DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 433 384 UD 032 990

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TITLE	The Child First Authority After-School Program: A Descriptive Evaluation. Report No. 38.
INSTITUTION	Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk, Baltimore, MD.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	1999-05-00
NOTE	80p.
CONTRACT	R-117-D40005
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative (142)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC04 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*After School Programs; Community Programs; Elementary Education; *Extended School Day; Models; *Parent Participation; Program Descriptions; *Program Effectiveness; Program Evaluation; *Urban Schools
IDENTIFIERS	*Baltimore City Public Schools MD

ABSTRACT

The Child First Authority (CFA) is a Baltimore (Maryland) community-wide after-school program that seeks to improve the quality of life in low socioeconomic status communities. The CFA, which is funded by local government agencies and coordinated by Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development (BUILD), established after-school programs in 10 schools during its first year of operation. Each program included an extended school-day component concentrating on academics. The program uses schools as hubs of activity in which parents, staff, administrators, church members, students, and other community members get together. BUILD oversees the program as a whole and specifies the parent/community components of the programs, but the programs have evolved differently at the different sites. This report describes the creation of CFA, the overall components of the program, and the activities in the start-up year. Data from the start-up year and the beginning of the second year indicate that a specific Child First model has been developed in which school sites use common concepts and administrative structures, maintain an academic extended school day component, and vary the types of activities that they offer according to local decisions and preferences. (Contains 19 figures and 8 references.) (Author/SLD)

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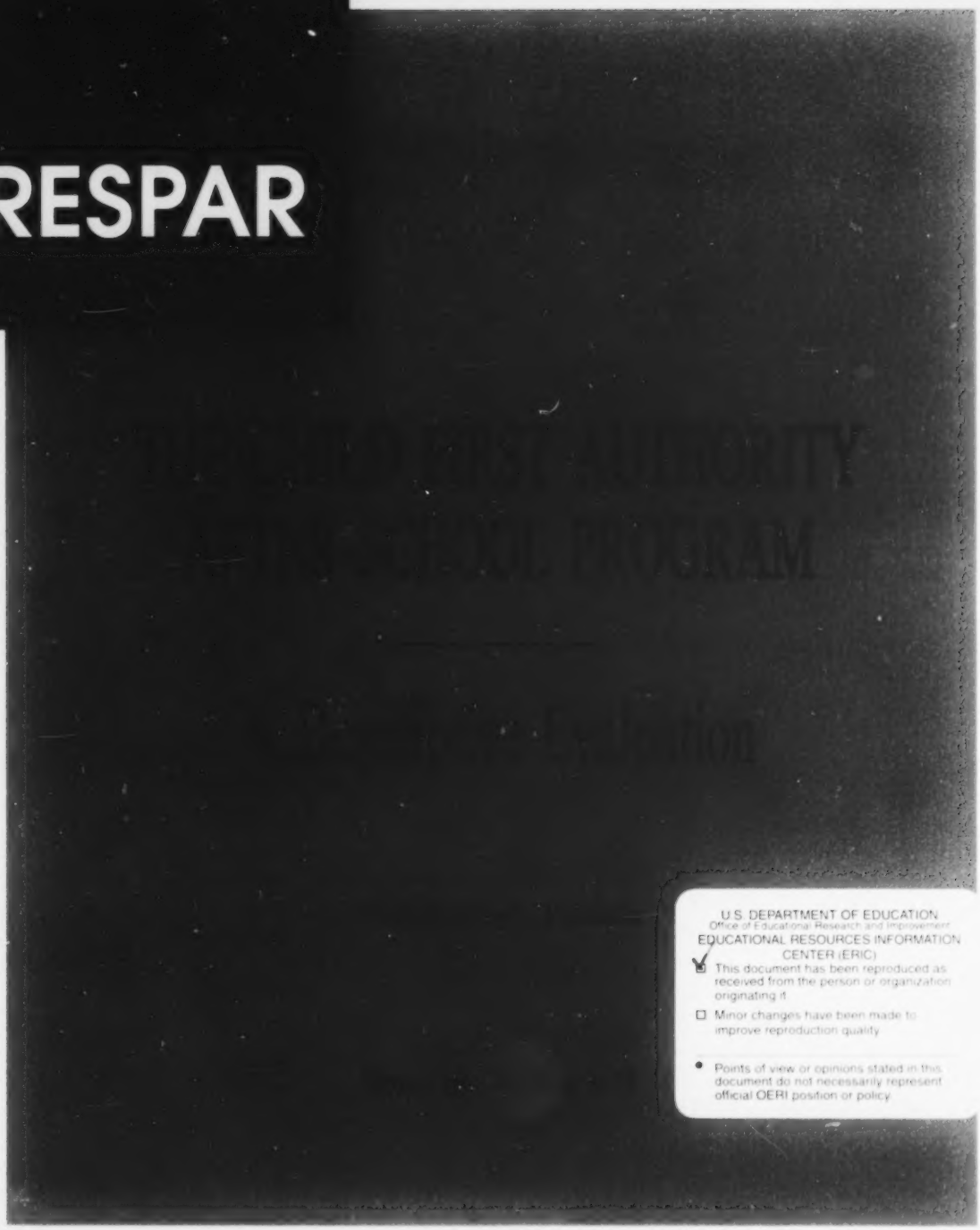

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THE CHILD FIRST AUTHORITY AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM

A Descriptive Evaluation

Olatokunbo S. Fashola

Johns Hopkins University

Report No. 38

May 1999

Published by the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk (CRESPAR), supported as a national research and development center by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education (R-117-D40005). The opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of OERI, and no official endorsement should be inferred.

The Center

Every child has the capacity to succeed in school and in life. Yet far too many children, especially those from poor and minority families, are placed at risk by school practices that are based on a sorting paradigm in which some students receive high-expectations instruction while the rest are relegated to lower quality education and lower quality futures. The sorting perspective must be replaced by a "talent development" model that asserts that all children are capable of succeeding in a rich and demanding curriculum with appropriate assistance and support.

The mission of the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk (CRESPAR) is to conduct the research, development, evaluation, and dissemination needed to transform schooling for students placed at risk. The work of the Center is guided by three central themes — ensuring the success of all students at key development points, building on students' personal and cultural assets, and scaling up effective programs — and conducted through seven research and development programs and a program of institutional activities.

CRESPAR is organized as a partnership of Johns Hopkins University and Howard University, in collaboration with researchers at the University of California at Santa Barbara, University of California at Los Angeles, University of Chicago, Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, University of Memphis, Haskell Indian Nations University, and University of Houston-Clear Lake.

CRESPAR is supported by the National Institute on the Education of At-Risk Students (At-Risk Institute), one of five institutes created by the Educational Research, Development, Dissemination and Improvement Act of 1994 and located within the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) at the U.S. Department of Education. The At-Risk Institute supports a range of research and development activities designed to improve the education of students at risk of educational failure because of limited English proficiency, poverty, race, geographic location, or economic disadvantage.

Abstract

The Child First Authority (CFA) is a Baltimore community-wide after-school program that seeks to improve the quality of life in low socioeconomic status communities. The CFA received funding from the Mayor's Office, the Governor, and the City Council through a local Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) branch named Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development (BUILD). During the first year of funding, the CFA established after-school programs in 10 schools. Each program included an extended-school-day component concentrating on academics. The main goal of the program is to improve the quality of life in Baltimore City by directly serving public school students and their families academically, culturally, and behaviorally in the after-school hours. The program uses the schools as hubs of activity in which parents, staff, administrators, church members, students, and other community members get together.

Although the overall goal of the program in each school site is the improvement of the quality of life, the CFA programs in the Baltimore schools are not all the same. BUILD oversees the programs as a whole, and specifies the parent/community components of the program, but the programs have evolved differently from site to site. For example, school sites have chosen to use or develop different academic and cultural enrichment programs, depending on the needs and the goals of the program planning team at each site.

This report describes the creation of CFA, the overall components of the program, and the activities conducted in the start-up year, for the purpose of providing an evaluation that the CFA Board of Directors and the school sites can use to examine their progress and continue the development of the program. Data from the start-up year and from the beginning of the second year indicate that a specific Child First model has been developed in which school sites employ common concepts and administrative structures, maintain an academic extended-school-day component, and vary the types of activities that they offer according to local decisions and preferences.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the CFA board members, especially Dr. Joel Carrington and Phil Stewart, CFA staff Prodgilee Pearson, Carol Reckling, all CFA sites and BUILD organizers with Child First schools, Avis Ransom of BUILD, Lottie Sneed, and K.C. Burton of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Their cooperation and support have been essential to this evaluation. I would also like to thank Barbara Colton for her editorial support, Bob Slavin for his helpful comments, and JHU students Susan Gagliardi, Claire Witner, and Rebecca Zarutskie for their diligence. Finally, this report is dedicated to the memory of John H. Hollifield, whose critical reading and exceptional editing made a difference in all Center reports.

Introduction

The Child First Authority (CFA) is a Baltimore community-wide after-school program that seeks to improve the quality of life in low socioeconomic status communities. The CFA received funding from the Mayor's Office, the Governor, and the City Council through a local Industrial Areas Foundation branch named Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development (BUILD). During the first year of funding, the CFA established after-school programs in 10 schools. Each program included an extended-school-day component concentrating on academics. The main goal of the program is to improve the quality of life in Baltimore City by directly serving public school students and their families academically, culturally, and behaviorally in the after-school hours. The program uses the schools as hubs of activity in which parents, staff, administrators, church members, students, and other community members get together.

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Creation of the Child First Authority

In 1995, representatives from a Baltimore grass-roots organization — Baltimoreans United In Leadership Development (BUILD) — and other community members met with the Mayor of the city of Baltimore to discuss the need for different ways of improving the lives of children and families in Baltimore City.

The need for after-school care was already an issue of concern in Baltimore. Research has shown that students who are not provided with adequate adult supervision during the non-school hours often fall prey to deviant behavior and become involved in delinquent acts (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Jacoby, 1986; Steinberg, 1986; CCSSO, 1987; Furby & Beyth-Marom, 1990; Henderson, 1990; Galambos & Maggs, 1991; Schwartz, 1996). Baltimore did

have some after-school programs already operating, but there were not enough to serve all students who would benefit, and not all of them were accessible due to cost, transportation, and other factors. The provision of after-school programs in widespread strategic locations throughout the city was seen as a method for improving the quality of life in these communities, not only for children, but also for families and communities as a whole. As a result of the meeting, the group decided that a comprehensive after-school program should be developed in the district of each City Council representative of Baltimore City.

Two crucial issues needed to be addressed in order for the after-school programs to eventually sustain themselves and become established as permanent after-school programs in the city. One issue was the need to establish continuous funding. Another issue was the need to establish a formal legal partnership between BUILD, Baltimore City, and the Baltimore City legislature — a partnership to be called the Child First Authority.

The group decided that the best way to ensure continuous allocated funding was to seek "re-dedicatable" funds — to ask the baseball team (Orioles), football team (Ravens), and other tax generating entities to pledge a certain percentage of their revenue to the Child First Authority. An initial success in this effort was a commitment from Peter Angelos, president of the Angelos Foundation, to the mayor's office to provide a substantial amount of funding.

Following a series of meetings in which they worked through problems involved in creating the Authority and securing funding, Mayor Kurt L. Schmoke, BUILD, City Council President Lawrence Bell, and representatives from the City Council participated in a press conference announcing the creation of the Child First Authority as the structure for establishing an effective after-school program for Baltimore City. The Child First Authority is the only such organization in the nation created to meet the needs of children that has bonding authority and the authority to receive and deploy a stream of dedicated funds for its on-going operation.

A month after the press conference, BUILD representatives announced that a Baltimore City delegate had agreed to draft legislation supporting Child First. The City Council ordinance creating the Child First Authority as an after-school program was signed into law in July 1996.

Selecting Child First Schools

Once the ordinance was passed, the next step was to identify and approach several public schools, one in each City Council district, and select ten that would serve as Child First Authority pilot schools. Members of BUILD identified possible schools during May of 1996

and then began discussions with the principals about Child First Authority schools. BUILD presented the principals with a covenant that entailed the following stipulations:

1. The principal of the school must identify key parents who would be able to participate in the Child First program.
2. The principal must also provide BUILD with access to parents who were not on the list, to broaden the scope and number of parents who would be available to participate in the program.
3. The principal must provide BUILD with access to space in the school and access to administrators and teachers who might be able to act as contributors to the extended school-day program.

Once the principals agreed to the terms of the covenant, the planning process began. A designated community organizer from BUILD led individual (one-to-one) meetings with parents, teachers, administrators, and community members. The meetings eventually became group meetings as the program progressed. The purpose of the meetings included introducing the concept of "creating a culture of change" in the community. Although Child First was an after-school program, it was also seen by the organizers as a way of introducing the concept of relational power to the schools, the parents, and the communities.[1] Specifically, the meeting participants discussed meaningful methods that the parents could use to create change in their own lives, in the lives of their children, and in the community as a whole by using the school as the center of activity. The non-school hours were identified as the specific time period during which the efforts towards community change would be most successful.

The organizers of the program discussed empowering parents through making them key stakeholders and decision-makers in the operation of the Child First programs at the various schools. During this process, the parents at each school became acquainted with each other and learned to work together (as well as with the teachers, administrators, and other community members). As the discussions progressed, the various participants began to work together as a planning team to develop and elaborate upon the specific components of the extended school-day program at their school. The planning team at each school included about equal numbers of parents, school staff, and church members. At each school, the planning team became the central decision-making body, responsible for overseeing the various components of the extended-school-day program.

During the summer of 1996 and then throughout the school year, the planning teams continued their meetings. At the beginning of the summer, the schools had not yet been confirmed as definite Child First sites for the following year, but were beginning to set up their Child First extended school-day programs.

The Child First Authority Structure

The Child First Authority has a unique structure that involves the Board of Directors, the parents, the community organizer, the principal, the school staff, the church, and the community in crucial roles that affect the overall success of the program. The various groups that define the Child First Authority and the roles they play include the following:

The Board of Directors

The Child First Authority Board of Directors acts as the ultimate decision maker over Child First policy issues. The Board consists of seven members: three members representing BUILD, three members representing the Mayor's Office, and one member representing the City Council. The Executive Director also serves as an ex-officio member of the CFA board.

The representatives from BUILD are appointed by the BUILD organization and act as liaisons between BUILD and the Child First Board. One of their major responsibilities is to supervise the BUILD fund-raising strategies. The organization identifies the goal of fund raising as securing re-dedicatable funds from local businesses, sports teams, and other tax generating funding sources. Because BUILD serves as the organizing branch of Child First, the representatives are responsible for updating the rest of the Board on the status of possible incoming schools.

The representatives from the Mayor's office are appointed by the Mayor and serve as his liaison to the Board. They oversee the smooth and timely allocation of funds coming from the Mayor's office.

The representative from the City Council, which enacted the legislation that created CFA, serves as the liaison between the President of the City Council and the Child First Board of Directors. This representative is appointed by the chair of the City Council, and is responsible for fund raising at each site from the office of the City Council.

In addition to their individual responsibilities, the members of the Child First Authority Board of Directors are responsible as a group for accepting or rejecting all Child First policy decisions. The Board is also in charge of making new policy decisions that ultimately affect the schools.

The Executive Director

The Executive Director of the Child First Authority is the main liaison between the Board and the sites. Although the Board of Directors sets the policies and procedures for the Child First Authority, the Executive Director is responsible for executing and implementing all of these policy decisions and procedures. The Executive Director is responsible for working with the different entities represented on the Board, and also making sure that the program is operating smoothly at each of the sites. This person meets on a regular basis with the organizers, board members, school principals, and Child First staff at the schools.

The BUILD Organizer

The organizer serves as a catalyst for the various sites through activating the process of change in Child First schools. Because the stakeholders are composed of participants who are not accustomed to working together, the organizer is responsible for helping the members of the program envision and understand the "culture of change" in the schools. The organizer introduces the school staff and parents to the concept of relational power and teaches them how it relates to the school. The organizer helps each site to create a planning team, composed of school staff, parents, and community members, which serves as the main representational body at each site. But rather than just encouraging parents to participate in planning meetings, the organizer invites and teaches the parents to become *engaged parents* — to act as decision makers and active participants in the design and the day-to-day running of the program.

The organizer does not make decisions for the planning team or act on behalf of any of the entities — instead, the organizer's role is to show the members of the team how they can understand and achieve "shared power and shared responsibility." The organizer stresses that parents can become active in the lives of their children, and that giving parents more power and more access to the program does not take away from the power of the school staff — the principal, teachers, and administrators. This can be a difficult message to convey because the groups involved are not generally used to working together. Cortes (1993) distinguishes between unilateral power and relational power. Relational power is what the organizer is responsible for teaching to the Child First participants. Therefore, the role of the organizer is critical. Whoever serves in this position must be careful not to rally one group against another, but instead must continuously bring them together to encourage cooperation on behalf of children, families, schools, and communities.

Involving parents in the after-school program is only one component of the organizer's ultimate goal. The successful involvement of parents in the after-school program is a stepping stone to the final goal of Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) organizations such as BUILD — to empower and mobilize the parents so that they can eventually create self-sustaining communities. Although it may be tempting and may produce less conflict to lead parents toward following the ideas of the "power" people such as teachers, administrators, or the organizers themselves, the organizer must continuously steer the groups away from such decision-making practices. Allowing the decision making to be the function of only one body of the Planning Team would destroy the cooperative and collaborative nature of the program.

When schools reach the point of being able to engage parents at all levels of the after-school program, they are ready to become Child First schools. The final "test" of whether the process of change is understood comes when the individual schools are able to create after-school and extended school-day centers with parents and leaders as core organizing and participating members. This is reflected in the proposals submitted by the schools.

The Principal

At each Child First school, the principal is the first person contacted by the BUILD organizer to begin the process of making a decision as to whether the school will become a Child First school. The key ingredient for a successful Child First principal is open-mindedness. She/he sets the tone for the creation of the program in the school and, ultimately, for the quality of the program. If the principal decides that she/he does not wish to "change the culture" of the school by implementing a parental after-school program, the program will not be started due to the inevitability of its failure. Conversely, if the principal decides that she/he would like to explore the program, and is open to "changing the culture" of the school by implementing a parental engagement after-school program, then talks about the possibility of a Child First after-school program begin.

The extent to which the principal believes in and acts according to the goals of the program determines the ability of the program to reach its goals. A successful principal understands that changing the culture of the school is a learning process. By being actively involved in the learning process, she/he learns when to let go, when to step up, and when to step to the side. Successful CFA principals realize that although they are responsible for the well-being of the students and the school as a whole, parents and other community members are able and willing to join forces and work towards a common goal.

Giving up power in school-related issues can be difficult for principals. The school may be located in a neighborhood that faces many challenges. Academic performance of the students may not be up to state standards, and principals may feel that they need to use all of their time to improve academics. Recently-hired principals may be reluctant to begin their jobs by giving up power, or may not understand the positive aspects of actively involving parents. The successful Child First principal realizes that the sharing of power is a learning process, and seeks to collaborate with the group as a whole as well as individually.

The Parents

Parents are the "backbone" of the Child First Authority program — their involvement and engagement is necessary both in the planning and in the continuance of the program. Even if all other entities are interested in being active participants, the extent to which the parents become involved determines the life and success of the program.

Parents who become involved in the program must understand the concept of a "culture of change." They must adapt to a new role and new methods of involvement and engagement. The role of the parent changes from "passive recipient" to "active leader." They must become key decision-makers for the program and work cooperatively with the other entities and stakeholders of the program. By participating in the one-on-one meetings, they learn to work with, trust, and build coalitions with each other. They learn which parents are motivated, and they learn to encourage other parents who may not yet be involved in the program. Parents who become involved in the program learn that "creating a culture of change" is an evolving process, and that change will occur gradually.

In addition to participating in the after-school programs, parents are taught to become community activists through engaging in actions developed in one-on-one meetings. In the one-on-one meetings, the BUILD group organizers teach parents the BUILD organizing strategies on how to "change the culture" of the school by teaching them the concept of relational power. The results include becoming more active participants in the lives of their children, the schools, and the communities in which they live. The extent to which the parents are able to internalize this concept, take ownership, and implement it determines the success of their roles as active participants in the program. The level of parental engagement is directly related to their ability to motivate other parents to become active members of the group by teaching them the concept of relational power. Parental engagement also includes involvement during the regular school day as well as in the after-school hours.

As parents learn about relational power and the need to extend their engagement into daily school activities and into community activism, the BUILD organizers emphasize that

"changing the culture" is a gradual process. The effects of this type of program can only be seen over a long period of time. The current culture of power has taken years to create, and changing it to relational power may take equally as long. It is important to set initial achievable milestones for the program that can be used to measure initial changes.

The Teacher

Teachers and other school staff play an important role in the overall as well as the day-to-day operation and success of the program. Teachers are the second largest group (after parents) acting as a decision-making body in the addition of a Child First after-school program. Teachers are directly responsible for the overall academic planning, development, and training component of the program. They provide the space for the program, and work on an individual level with the parents. A teacher who chooses to participate in the Child First Authority program is expected to act as both an academic instructor and a champion of the "culture of change" goal. By participating in the program, such a teacher has accepted that not all of the needs of the children are being met by the school. She/he understands that actively including the parents in the various facets of the program is essential to improving the lives of the children.

Child First Authority teachers show their acceptance of the program's tenets through teaching in the program, running the program, training other teachers, parents, and/or community members, providing space, and sharing materials. Teachers are responsible for planning curricular alignment for the academic programs as well as overseeing the cultural and recreational programs. They are also an important part of connecting or aligning school-day objectives with after-school activities.

The Community

The Child First Authority community includes the BUILD churches and other groups that desire to work with the after-school program. As seen in the community's presence at school programs, community rallies, and planning team meetings, the community is considered a natural component of the program. Because the ultimate goal of the program is community change, the extent to which the community is involved determines the extent to which community change can become an actuality. Community volunteers are responsible for informing others about the program, and for getting other members of the community to participate in all possible ways.

During the startup of the CFA program at each school, the community volunteer along with the core staff coordinates "neighborhood walks." In these walks, an assembly of parents, teachers, students, and community members knock on the doors of the homes of enrolled students, informing the community of the presence of Child First. The neighborhood walks, which are also referred to as "Walks for Success," fulfill many different purposes. The most important two functions of these walks are familiarizing the community with the program and recruiting families to register in the program. Neighborhood walks also serve as a way to create bonds among the CFA participants and prepare them to work together in the future on specific issues that pertain to their communities.

The six Child First entities — the board of directors, BUILD organizer, principal, parents, teachers, and community — provide the overall structure of the Child First Authority and play important roles in creating and shaping the Child First Authority after-school program as a whole and at each school. Thus each site reflects common structures and concepts that identify it as a Child First Authority site. Each school, however, also creates and maintains a general but school-specific set of positions whose members work together to determine its individual program. The next section provides an overview of the general structure of Child First Authority programs at each site.

The School-Site Child First Authority Structure

The Planning Team

As previously noted, the most important site-based CFA group that directly influences the day-to-day operations as well as the overall administration of the program is the planning team. This team, which *must* be established at every school, makes the ultimate decisions on issues involving Child First at the individual sites. The planning team at each site meets at least once every two weeks. At the meetings, the members make decisions regarding administration, staffing, curriculum, budgeting, and other issues. At least 50% of the body of the planning team at each site is composed of parents. The team also consists of the principal and administrators, teachers, BUILD church members, the BUILD organizer, and additional community members. This committee reviews and approves all plans and budgets before they are submitted to the CFA Board of Directors.

During the formation process of the extended school-day program, the planning team identifies and forms committees which are delegated to carry out specific responsibilities. The

responsibilities cover issues related to setting up, developing, and carrying out the program, including administration, team readiness, facility readiness, registration, class readiness, budget and finance, evaluation, and milestones.

Administration Committee

The administration committee at each CFA site oversees staffing, policies, procedures, the academic portion of the program, and outreach to parents, church members, and other community members.

Administration committees at various sites created three key positions during the start-up year that are responsible for the overall running of the program, the academic content, and the outreach component. These three positions were the program coordinator, the academic coordinator, and the volunteer coordinator. At the various sites, teachers, parents, community members, and church members have staffed these positions. The duties generally include:

Program Coordinator. The program coordinator is responsible for coordinating and ensuring acceptable coverage of all activities of every Child First Academy. In addition to overseeing the overall operation of the program, including scheduling of classes and/or clubs, the program coordinator is responsible at some sites for running parent conferences. The person in this position confers with and works with the academic coordinator and volunteer coordinator to plan staff development and evaluation sessions with both credentialed and non-credentialed instructors. In collaboration with the school principal, parents, and church leaders, Program coordinators facilitate meetings of the Child First planning team and address ongoing program issues.

Academic Coordinator. During the first year, the administration committee also decided that it was important to have a core staff member responsible for overseeing and coordinating the academic program. The position of academic coordinator was created to ensure an alignment between the school-day experience and the after-school experience. This member of the core staff coordinates academic and cultural activities, ensures that School Improvement Team (SIT) goals are met in the extended-school-day program, and plans academic enrichment activities that support these goals. She/he is also responsible for maintaining a relationship with designated parent and church leaders, and for maintaining the commitment of volunteers to the program. Regular meetings are held with the program coordinator and with the volunteer coordinator, as well as with the instructors of the academic

program (both credentialed and non-credentialed). The academic coordinator reports to the program coordinator.

Parent/Volunteer Coordinator. Because a main focus of the Child First Authority mission is involving parents and community and church members in the day-to-day operation of the extended school-day program, the position of parent/volunteer coordinator was created to ensure that this aspect of the program would be monitored.

The volunteer coordinator is responsible for establishing and maintaining contact with parents and identified church and community leaders. Staff members in this position are responsible for maintaining records of volunteer hours, all parent and community contacts, collaborations, and the work of recruited volunteers. This coordinator plans the volunteer schedules of community members and parents, and ensures adequate volunteer coverage during the extended-school days. Along with the academic coordinator, the volunteer coordinator is responsible for parent conferences, and meets weekly with instructors. The volunteer coordinator reports to the program coordinator.

Team Readiness Committee

The team readiness committee at each school addresses the readiness of the various committees and entities involved in the program. The committee oversees registration, community outreach, and public relations sessions for the various components. In order to inform the members of the groups about the programs, and to invite parent participation in the program, the team readiness committee is responsible for organizing events such as potluck dinners. Before the beginning of the session, the team readiness committee reports the number of parents who have agreed to volunteer hours each month in the CFA extended school-day program.

Facility Readiness Committee

The facility readiness committee at each school oversees issues involving safety at after-school program sites. Some of the responsibilities of the committee include finding quality space for the program, issuing identification badges for all participants in the program, making sure the children in the program can be monitored at all times, and monitoring the outer surroundings of the program. In one school, the Child First program was held in portable buildings. Prior to the startup of the program, the facility readiness committee checked the

buildings to make sure that the heating vents were working, that the carpeting was in good repair, and that the transition from the school classroom to the portable buildings would be smooth. The facility readiness committee, as with the other committees, is made up of teachers, church members, staff, and parents.

Registration Committee

The goal of the registration committee is to get parents to register their children in the Child First extended-day program. The committee plans events to inform families of the program such as the neighborhood walks described earlier and potluck dinners in the homes of the parents as well as on the school grounds. Once a substantial number of parents has signed up, the committee holds orientation and registration sessions where committee members inform parents about the rules and regulations involved in participating in the program and invite parents to actively participate at least four hours per month.

Class Readiness Committee

The responsibility of the class readiness committee is to select the most appropriate classes for a particular session. In order to complete this goal, the committee is responsible for identifying areas that are most closely linked to the goals of the School Improvement Team (SIT) as well as classes that participants will enjoy taking and teaching. One method for establishing the class offerings involves sending surveys to parents, children, and teachers. The surveys ask the program participants to select the activities (including field trips) that they would most like to see take place in the extended-school-day program. The parents may also be asked what activities they would most like to participate in either as instructors (cultural and recreational classes), students (GED classes), or members of support groups (parental support group). The classes proposed and the instructors identified by the class readiness committee are reviewed and approved by the planning team. In most schools, the classes offered in the Child First extended-school-day program reflect the classes (consistent with school and team goals) selected by the participants.

Budget/Finance Committee

The budget/finance committee for each site is responsible for preparing the budget for the first quarterly session of the extended-school-day program and presenting it to the planning team for approval. The budget/finance committee for each school prepares at least four statements yearly, one for each session.

Evaluation Committee

The evaluation committee is responsible for identifying evaluation questions that may address issues pertinent to the success of the program. The evaluation committee at each school discusses methods of gathering feedback about the program.

Milestones Committee

The role of the milestones committee is to propose a set of milestones that the program should accomplish and to gauge progress toward achieving them. Milestones provide a series of indicators of success that show that the program is proceeding in the right direction toward accomplishing its goals. Documentation of progress on these indicators provides evidence of accountability and increases the motivation of participants. Milestones may include such elements as increased numbers of volunteers, increased volunteer hours, individual student successes in various events, documentation of successfully completed community activities, and so on.

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The eight committees, staffed and run by parent and community volunteers and school personnel, are defining components of the Child First Authority program in each school. The existence of the eight components at each school and their consistency of operations identify the program as Child First. The ability of the program sites to establish and operate the Child First extended-school-day program can be attributed to their organized structure and their delegation of authority to all members of the community.

Profiles of the Initial Ten Child First Programs

As noted, Child First programs were established at school sites in ten Baltimore City communities in the start-up year. In this section, we briefly summarize information on these schools — the committees and components they have established to date and the challenges that they still face in building a complete Child First extended school-day program. All ten sites are being evaluated in this formative manner so they can revise and change their components if necessary before we begin evaluations of the effectiveness of the overall program and the program components at each site. See Appendix A for data on Child First academies at two of the schools.

Dr. Bernard Harris Jr. Elementary School

Dr. Bernard Harris Jr. Elementary School was the first site to open a Child First extended-school-day program during the 1996-97 start-up year. The program began the year with students enrolled and three coordinators in place — the program coordinator, parent coordinator, and the academic coordinator. The program was instituted after conducting planning sessions, neighborhood walks, registrations, and orientation sessions. The school forged alliances with both the St. Francis Xavier Church and Knox Presbyterian Church. These relationships remained constant during the start-up year of the program. The program offered mostly cultural classes, with homework and emergent literacy serving as the academic themes. The teachers from the school provided curricular alignment with instruction that took place during the day — emphasizing homework and literacy with a focus on writing. Over the first year of the program, the Bernard Harris Elementary School documented an increase in the number of parent volunteers who had volunteered at least once in the program.

Scope of the program: The program at Dr. Bernard Harris Elementary School had a writing theme. All students participated in homework help classes taught and supervised mainly by teachers from the regular day classes. For the homework help activities at Dr. Bernard Harris, the after-school teachers created a system with some of the homeroom teachers that allowed them to collect homework assignments early during the day. This helped the students to complete their homework — even students who reported misplacing their homework. Additional academic activities include reading clubs, mathematics, and entrepreneurship, taught in a class titled "banking." Cultural activities included cooking, various field trips, arts and crafts, sewing, and band. Recreational activities included sports and board games.

Challenges: A month after the program began (during the first session), the BUILD organizer from Child First at Bernard Harris left the position. After the first session, the parent involvement coordinator also left the program. The program was forced to rearrange the structure of the core staff to meet the responsibilities of these positions. At the end of the start-up year, the principal of Bernard Harris Elementary School retired, leaving her position as a key member of the after-school program unfilled.

Although the loss of the organizer created initial alarm, the Bernard Harris Child First Authority program did not suffer to a great extent from his loss and the loss of others. The ability of the program to continue despite the staff problems and challenges can be attributed to the school's strong belief in the after-school program and its intended academic goal. The united support of the program by the school, the community, and the planning team allowed the program to overcome its difficulties. Although the principal was an important element of

the program, the teachers, parents, and the planning team made most of the decisions for the program. Because Dr. Bernard Harris Elementary School has also been involved in the National Network of Partnership Schools of the Center on Schools, Families, and Communities for several years, the school had a strong history of working with parents and community members. The person who eventually became the new program coordinator for Child First was also the liaison for the network, and thus had long-standing experience in collaborating with parents and community members. This is one of the main reasons that the program continued to endure for the remaining sessions.

The former principal at the Dr. Bernard Harris Elementary School was well respected by and had strong relationships with the community, school, and parents. She had recently received a principal's achievement award. Thus, the program had been initially nurtured by strong participants who fully supported the concepts and beliefs of Child First, new participants in the positions who were capable, and parents and community members who had become engaged in the program. Given these factors, the program was able to overcome what could have been major problems in the continuing establishment and maintenance of the program. Parents and community members, in fact, noted that the loss of the parent organizer helped the program realize to see the importance of having an effective parent/community liaison.

John Eager Howard Elementary School

The next school to open a Child First extended school-day program was the John Eager Howard Elementary School. The program began with a program coordinator, academic coordinator, and volunteer coordinator in place, but the structure of this program differed slightly from others in that a BUILD church organizer served as program coordinator. The church that partnered with this site was the Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church. Prior to the opening of the program, staff, parents, and students were surveyed to explore which programs they would like to see offered. When the program began, the course offerings focused heavily on homework completion and teaching basic skills with an enrichment approach. As with the other programs, many of the academic instructors were certified instructors from the school staff.

The staff of John Eager Howard Child First extended school-day program differed slightly from the other schools. The program coordinator was a church leader during the start-up year, but she trained a parent to take on this role in the following year. The academic coordinator was a teacher, and the parent/volunteer coordinator was a parent who also worked with Americorps/Vista.

Scope of the program: The John Eager Howard Child First Academy offered a variety of programs broken down by grade and activity type. The types of activities were divided into academic, cultural, and recreational activities. All of the students had a mixture of academic and cultural/recreational classes, yet the actual classes varied from grade to grade.

Activities for kindergarten students included reading, thinking, drama, and dance. First grade students were involved in academic activities such as thinking, reading, science, and cooking. Cultural and recreational activities included drama, dance, gym, art, and music. Students in the grades two through five participated in academic activities such as science and cooking, and cultural and recreational activities such as art, step dancing, drama, gym, and karate.

Challenges: During the first session of the program, the input from parents indicated that they wanted a program that included assistance with homework. This view, however, was not shared by all the planning team participants — some members, including many teachers, felt that homework was an academic activity that was supposed to be completed only in the home. Despite differences of opinion, the first session of the program incorporated homework assistance. At the end of the first session, after seeing positive results for students who had completed their homework in the program, more teachers agreed that it was a worthwhile component. Also, more students became interested in and signed up for the homework assistance. By the end of the third session, all of the students enrolled in the John Eager Howard Child First extended-school-day program were engaged in homework sessions, and teachers were showing their support.

Govans Elementary School

Govans Elementary School began as a Child First school during November of the start-up year. The program began with a program coordinator, volunteer coordinator, and academic coordinator. To increase school, student and neighborhood support, the Govans Child First extended school-day program engaged in initial orientation procedures such as neighborhood meetings and walks, one-on-one meetings, and registration sessions. Students were recruited to the program through the student newsletter. The school's extended-day program served 138 students during its start-up year.

The content of the Child First program for the whole school focused on academic enrichment covering basic skills and preparation for the Maryland State Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP), a performance-based statewide test. The majority of the teachers in this program were certified. The after-school instructors were responsible for linking the curriculum to the goals of the School Improvement Team. Govans Child First also

hired parents to serve as cultural instructors during the start-up year. The school began with about 20 parents and community members volunteering in the program. The principal and assistant principal backed the program strongly. Most of teachers in the academic component of the program were from the regular school-day program. The core staff for the program also consisted mostly of teachers from the school.

Scope of the program: The Child First classes at Govans Elementary School were a mixture of academic, recreational, and cultural activities. Academic activities at Govans were thematically based and geared toward each grade level, covering topics such as holidays, "Special Me," and Countdown to MSPAP. Other academic activities included reading, book clubs, and computer activities. Cultural activities included dance, drama, art, music, a service program called "Magic Me," and student choirs.

Challenges: After going through the initial Child First processes of engaging in discussions, accepting the processes of change, and being a part of the planning team to fill coordinator positions, the Govans principal took a position at another school, and the assistant principal became the new principal. As noted, the assistant principal supported the program fully, so the impact of the loss of a key program member was softened. Also, the school's teachers continued their strong belief that, along with others, they had a stake in ownership of the program. During the creation and start-up year, the teachers were a core part of the infrastructure of the program, responsible for many of the day-to-day operations. Although the loss of the principal created a challenge for the program, the strength of the staff support allowed the program to continue smoothly.

One of the major challenges for Govans Elementary School Child First was the parental component. Although the core staff understood the goals of the program, and Govans Elementary School received awards for parental involvement, the Child First Authority staff felt that the parents had not been included enough in the core part of the program. Because active parent engagement in all facets of the program was identified as a key goal by both BUILD and the Child First Authority, Govans Elementary planned to work on increasing the amount of parent involvement in the program in the upcoming year.

General Wolfe Elementary School

General Wolfe Elementary School was one of the later schools to open up a Child First Authority extended-school-day program. Because the school was reconstitution eligible, it was in the midst of implementing a school-wide reform program at the same time that it made the decision to become a Child First school. Despite the positive potential effects that might be

derived from an extended-school-day program, the additional project was another source of pressure for the principal.

Scope of the program: Academic activities for students attending General Wolfe Elementary School were similar for students in all grades. These were a mixture of remedial and cultural classes. Academic classes included tutoring across the curriculum, mathematics enrichment, book clubs, and a vocational skills program titled "Living Classrooms." General Wolfe did not have a playground, so they formed collaborative relationships with outside partners. For recreational activities such as sports, the students took weekly trips to local community recreation centers and Police Athletic League centers. For cultural activities, the school formed partnerships with the local theater, as well as with some local historic and visitor centers. Child First participants at General Wolfe Elementary School visited these places at least once per week.

Challenges: In the middle of the planning process for the Child First extended school-day program at General Wolfe, the BUILD organizer left the position. Although another BUILD organizer fulfilled the role, the program did indeed suffer a setback — the program start-up was delayed until further group meetings were able to get it on track again, and the program itself could not build the strong components that it wanted because of time and personnel constraints. Thus the General Wolfe structures differed substantially from those of other schools.

The program coordinator at General Wolfe was a community member who had no children in the program. He also served as academic coordinator. Few members of the school staff were actually involved in the program. Because of the paucity of staff involvement, the extended-school-day curriculum was not aligned with teacher instruction during the day.

Greenspring Middle School

Greenspring Middle School was the only Child First middle school during the 1996-1997 school year. Greenspring Middle was selected to be a Child First school in the summer of 1996 and opened its extended school-day program in November, with students enrolled and a program coordinator. Greenspring Middle was engaged in planning sessions, neighborhood walks, one-on-one sessions, registration, and orientation sessions. During its first year of operation, Greenspring Middle forged a relationship with Grace Presbyterian Church. This relationship remained constant during the first year. The curriculum at Greenspring Middle focused on a combination of basic skills and enrichment programs. Teachers from the regular school-day program taught in the afternoon, and they attempted to align what was taught

during the day with what was taught during the after-school CFA programs. During the start-up year, all of the core staff except the parent coordinator were from the school.

Scope of the program: This was the only middle school involved with Child First. Greenspring CFA had an academic focus, with goals of improving students' performance on the local standardized tests. Rather than approach this as a remedial program, Greenspring Middle School taught the students using an enrichment and "fun" approach to learning. Academic activities included homework assistance, mathematics made easy, and computer club. Recreational and cultural classes included cooking classes with Chef Kirk, games of strategy, and basketball.

Challenges: From the time when discussions about Child First began at Greenspring Middle School, parental involvement was a challenge. When the school was initially approached, staff members were able to identify a small number of parents who would be interested in working with the program. This number slowly climbed and gradually reached an acceptable number, but it was still below expectations. After many long conversations and negotiations, the school was accepted as a Child First school. What made Greenspring Middle School unique was that the teachers and parents worked very diligently to attain the desired goals. The organizer understood that this was a middle school, and that it might be difficult to draw parent volunteers into the program. During the first year of CFA at Greenspring, the program staff continued to work diligently at recruiting volunteers, but they did not quite reach their goal. An additional challenge that the school faced revolved around the issue of staffing. When CFA entered Greenspring Middle School, there were already other after-school programs in the school, and thus it was not as easy to attract and hire school staff. Although GMS was able to hire and attract staff initially, there was some turnover, which continued throughout the year.

Despite the challenges of attracting parents, the program lasted throughout the year, and continued the following year. At Greenspring Middle, although all of the stakeholders were represented at the planning meetings, the main people who took responsibility for the program were the school principal and some of the teachers. The program persevered at Greenspring because the principal, some teachers, and the organizer wanted the program there. At the end of the year, the school staff examined the parental involvement in the program. They acknowledged that they definitely needed to work on parental involvement during the following year, but they also admitted that regardless of numbers, the quality of their relationship with the parents was definitely stronger than it had been prior to having Child First in the program.

Cherry Hill Elementary School

Cherry Hill Elementary School opened its doors to the first Child First academy in November of 1996. Cherry Hill Elementary School had an interesting history with Child First. During the selection process, there were two schools located practically next door to one another. Patapsco Elementary School was selected to become a Child First school, and they chose to bring on Cherry Hill Elementary as a partner site, but with Patapsco as the lead school. This established the relationship between Cherry Hill and Patapsco, and also between Cherry Hill and other Child First schools. The organizer for Cherry Hill remained with the school for the entire year. Similar to the other sites, this site also engaged in one-on-one meetings with organizers, staff, and parents, and also spent the summer planning the program. When Cherry Hill Elementary Child First academy opened up, there were volunteers performing the duties usually carried out by the parent and program coordinators, but the only core staff person on payroll was the academic coordinator who carried out the responsibilities of two or three staff people.

Scope of the program: The classes at Cherry Hill Elementary School were a combination of remedial and enrichment classes, focusing on language arts, and more specifically on reading. This was more the case in grades 1-3. Some of the academic programs included reading, writing, mathematics, science, and computer programs for adults. Cultural classes included art, sewing for children and adults, art, photography, drama, dance, music, and cooking. Recreational classes included sports, chess and other board games, and aerobics for adults and for children. In addition to the academic programs, the students were asked to select two classes a day to participate in.

Challenges: The main challenge at Cherry Hill was getting enough staff members to take ownership of the program. The only core position that existed was that of the academic coordinator. Although this person fulfilled many of the major responsibilities, it was difficult for one staff member to assume all of the responsibility and ownership of the program. The academic coordinator looked forward to delegating more responsibilities during the following year. The second main challenge at Cherry Hill revolved around the issue of identity. Because Patapsco Elementary was the lead school for Child First in the Cherry Hill area, it was difficult for Cherry Hill Elementary to establish an identity of its own as a separate site. This influenced administrative decisions and the running of the program. Unfortunately, the school did not establish an identity of its own, and there were no talks about a separate identity during the following year. During the second year, Cherry Hill was no longer a Child First participant.

Patapsco Elementary School

Patapsco Elementary School opened its doors to the first Child First academy in November of 1996. Patapsco was selected to become a Child First school, and the staff members there chose to bring on Cherry Hill Elementary as a partner site, but with Patapsco as the lead school. When Patapsco opened its CFA program, there were volunteers performing the duties usually carried out by the parent and program coordinators, but the only core staff person on payroll was the academic coordinator. Similar to Cherry Hill, this person carried out the responsibilities of two or three staff people. However, Patapsco had more staff and parents involved in the program. The program at Patapsco involved a combination of enrichment and remedial classes, arts and crafts, and sports activities. The first year at Patapsco was interesting, because in addition to having Child First, the academic morale of the school was high. Patapsco Elementary had recently received citywide recognition for excellent academic performances on the standardized tests, and was being considered as a Blue Ribbon school.

Scope of the program: As with other schools, Patapapsco Elementary School had a mixture of academic, cultural, and recreational classes for students in grades kindergarten through grade six. Academic classes included homework help, "Great Chefs," writing through the sciences, reading, and computer classes. Cultural classes included etiquette, arts and crafts, cooking, sewing, and dance. Recreational classes included board games, cheerleading, sports clinic, and karate.

Challenges: The organizer at Patapsco Elementary remained there for the entire year. Like many of the other schools, Patapsco Elementary did not have much experience with organizing activities during the first year. However, the main challenge faced by Patapsco was also a challenge of identity, but in a different manner from Cherry Hill. Patapsco had been established as the lead site of the two schools, yet specific information on how this relationship would be worked out during the year was not provided. It was a learning experience for all of the entities involved, and this made things slightly difficult.

Eutaw Marshburn Elementary School

Eutaw Marshburn Elementary School was approached and selected for a Child First program much like the other schools. Eutaw Marshburn, however, did not open its doors until much later in the school year (January). The school worked with Brown Memorial Presbyterian Church, and the original organizer remained with the program during the year. Eutaw Marshburn was one of the last CFA sites to open its doors to students, because the school was not as ready to become a Child First school as its sister schools. Nonetheless, the program ran

from January until the end of the academic year (June), and maintained a relationship with the church. The program at Eutaw Marshburn had some academic components, but it was more of a cultural and recreational program. The program was staffed mainly by two master teachers serving as the core staff of the program, in the positions of academic coordinators 1 and 2. The program also had a parental involvement coordinator. At the end of the fist session of the program, Eutaw Marshburn Child First academy hired a new program coordinator who worked with the program from March until the end of the academic year.

Scope of the program: Students at Eutaw Marshburn Elementary School were offered academic, recreational, and cultural activities. Academic activities included homework assistance and Spanish for students in kindergarten through fifth grade. Other activities included computer classes for students in grades one thorough four. First, fourth, and fifth grade students also enrolled in family science classes.

For cultural activities, all of the students were involved in the Rites of Passage (ROP) program, a cultural program that teaches African American students social skills, history, and culture, using an Afrocentric curriculum. Additional cultural and recreational classes included music, dance, nutritional cooking, music and flutes, board games, and personal grooming classes.

Challenges: When Eutaw Marshburn Elementary School was initially approached, the principal was receptive to the concept of Child First as it was presented by the organizer. The organizer and the principal discussed and created the program at the school. Soon after Child First opened at Eutaw Marshburn, the school lost its principal. The new principal had not been involved in the discussions pertaining to Child First and the IAF organizing philosophy. Additionally, although the former principal of the program was very receptive, this interest and understanding did not necessarily transfer to the other two important groups — the teachers and the parents — and much of the progress that had been made with the program was stifled. The two staff members who eventually operated and implemented the program did indeed run an after-school program, but they did not use the IAF philosophy, and the Child First program a this school operated more as an after-school program, with fewer of the Child First components present. The people who seemingly embraced the program did not have the same conceptual understanding of the program as some of the other schools did. At the end of the year, the planning team understood that the lines of communication needed to be widened among all of the entities. The second year began with the same principal, but a different Child First core staff. The program coordinator did not return, the two master teachers were transferred to other schools, and, the program began with a new BUILD organizer.

Yorkwood Elementary School

Yorkwood Elementary School was one of the last two schools to open its doors as a Child First academy. Yorkwood was selected and approached at the same time as the other schools, but the CFA program did not begin until January, 1997. Yorkwood Elementary worked with a local BUILD church, but it faced challenges early in the planning process. Similar to Bernard Harris and General Wolfe elementary schools, the organizer for Yorkwood relocated around the beginning of the year. Unlike Dr. Bernard Harris Elementary School, however, Yorkwood was not as far along in the planning process and in the creation of the various committees. The school was assigned a new temporary organizer, who worked with the parents and some of the teachers. Finally, in January of 1997, the program at Yorkwood Elementary School began with a core staff of three parents in the roles of program coordinator, academic coordinator, and volunteer coordinator. The program maintained a relationship with a BUILD church and the BUILD organizer during the entire year. The program at Yorkwood was a mixture of academic, cultural, and recreational programs, run mostly by parents and community members. This was a new experience for Yorkwood, as there were no after-school programs in the school prior to Child First, and very few of the parents had actually been involved in their children's education on a regular basis. When the program was finally established at Yorkwood, though, it was primarily a parent-run program. In the middle of the academic year, BUILD hired a new organizer, who became the main organizer for the CFA program at Yorkwood Elementary School, and he remained with them for the rest of the year, and during the second year.

Scope of the program: The Yorkwood Child First academy taught academic, recreational, and cultural classes to students in kindergarten through fifth grade. Academic subjects included language arts, mathematics, reading, computer classes, and geography. Cultural classes included art, community art, sewing, music, and dance. Recreational classes included board games and gym activities.

Challenges: Yorkwood Elementary School's first challenge was starting the program. Yorkwood was approached at the same time as the other Child First schools, but it took several meetings and announcements to convince the entities that it was possible to create a Child First program. Shortly after the stakeholders came together, they ended up without an organizer for a short period of time. However, Yorkwood was able to overcome this obstacle and continue the planning process. Although all of the stakeholders agreed to begin Child First, the main entities who remained involved in the program during the first year were the parents, with little input from the other entities. This would prove to be a challenge in the future, because it takes all of the stakeholders working together to successfully run a complete Child First program. The final challenge was the turnover in the organizing staff. Within a period of one year,

Yorkwood had gone through three organizers, and, although the core elements of the program mostly remained the same, a lot of time was spent getting acquainted and acclimated to the new leaders. The program did survive, though, and a number of the students and core staff returned the following year.

Calvin Rodwell Elementary School

Calvin Rodwell Elementary School opened its doors as a Child First academy in November, after the same negotiations as similar schools. The core staff at Calvin Rodwell consisted of a program coordinator, an academic coordinator, and a parent/volunteer coordinator. The program coordinator at Calvin Rodwell was a BUILD organizer from the local church.

Scope of the program: Calvin Rodwell Elementary offered a variety of programs. Academic programs included homework assistance, creative storytelling, and computer classes for all students. Cultural classes included arts and crafts, dance, drama, and music. Recreational activities included Olympic-style sports activities for students in all grades.

Challenges: The first year at Calvin Rodwell was relatively uneventful. The main challenge was that the CFA program was perceived to be slightly more as an after-school program than an organizing program. Although the program coordinator was from a BUILD church, participation from the churches was low. Participation from the school existed, but it was mainly the school principal who remained strongly involved. Ownership of the program by the school staff was not quite as strong as it could have been. The second main challenge during this year was low enrollment. One possible explanation for this was that the first few months of the program were spent creating the program and getting it up and running. The program coordinator acknowledged this, and agreed to find ways to increase enrollment and reduce attrition during the following year.

Lessons Learned

Child First was an initiative begun by four groups — parents, church members, school staff, and community members — that had little prior experience in collaborating with one another. The start-up year of the program served as a learning experience for all of the participants involved. The groups were also not accustomed to sharing directive power and not acquainted with relational power. Despite the newness of the alliance, in general, most of the parties learned how to share power and work collaboratively. The experience gained and the

lessons learned by all the sites in the first year should contribute to successful outcomes in future years.

LESSON 1: Parental engagement is the "backbone" of the program.

When the concept of a Child First Authority was initially presented to the public and some of the stakeholders, Child First was perceived as an after-school program. The original goal of the Authority was to improve the lives of Baltimore City children and their families during the hours of 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. by creating an after-school program for them. However, Child First, as perceived by BUILD, was also designed to empower parents by making them agents of change in their communities and teaching them to become equal partners in a culture of collaboration using relational power and strategies. Child First uses the after-school hours to provide parents with opportunities to volunteer in their children's schools, but this participation in the lives of the children during the non-school hours is just the beginning of efforts to mobilize the parents. The next step is to improve and increase parental participation during the regular school day. But it does not end here. Although the types of participation that have been reported are satisfactory, the ultimate goal is to engage parents as key decision makers in all aspects of the school and the community.

Through one-on-one meetings, BUILD organizers instruct parents on how to turn *themselves* into agents of change and sources of power and information. The ultimate success for the Child First Authority is when parents understand this power and use it to effect change in their schools *and* in their communities. According to BUILD, when the parents understand and act upon the power that they have to control their surroundings, they will be able to make their communities respectable, sustainable, and high quality environments in which anyone would be proud to live.

LESSON 2: The Child First program in each school should function as an extended-school-day program, emphasizing academic components and alignment with the school-day curriculum.

The original documents on CFA require the various schools to coordinate the academic components of their CFA programs with the goals of the School Improvement Team (SIT) plan. Some schools have furthered the cohesion between the school-day and after-school academics by hiring regular school-day teachers to teach during the extended school day. In the various program proposals, the schools show that all of the *academic* teachers are both credentialed and certified. Although the lesson plans during the start-up year did not always reflect coordination with the goals of the SIT, in the future, the schools can strengthen this component in the upcoming year. The majority of the proposals from the start-up year

discussed the fact that the classes were designed around what the Class Readiness committee at each school felt that the children needed. In many cases, results from the Maryland State Performance Assessment Program were used to determine the needs of the students.

Child First takes place on the school site, employs teachers from the regular school day, and aligns the program's academic activities with instruction carried on during the school day. The Child First program implementers realize, however, that students in the Baltimore City public schools have needs for development in areas of their lives in addition to academic enrichment. Social skills and cultural components are implemented with the desire to have a long-lasting impact in the lives of children in the after-school academy. Recreational programs are also important — each of the sites offer sports and recreational programs for all students in all grades. Social and cultural programs include Magic Me, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, Rites of Passage, and others. The cultural and social programs address critical needs that many students have. For example, Magic Me provides the children with opportunities to develop inter-generational relationships through exposing them to senior citizens on a regular basis. The program is designed to forge relationships between the students and the older residents of the community. These relationships teach the children concepts such as respect, relating to others, and understanding and taking care of the body. Children are instructed in how the body works and how to acknowledge feelings and emotions like affection, frustration, success, and helplessness by keeping diaries. In addition to learning how to express emotion in a socially acceptable fashion, the expression of feelings in a diary also builds on their writing skills.

A final need that the program addresses is the development of specific skills that may later become areas of expertise or hobbies. Many schools lack creative arts and physical education programs as a result of city and school budget cuts, but CFA is able to use the after-school hours to bring these types of programs back into the schools.

LESSON 3: There *is* a Child First model.

The Child First Authority program began with an idea of what a fully developed and implemented Child First school should look like, what a Child First school should offer, and what issues a Child First school administration should address.

The first year was spent creating and defining the program components in order to create a model of components and concepts that would be central to the ethos and the goals of CFA as a whole. These relate to the overall organizational structure as well as the day-to-day implementation of the program and delivery of services.

During the first year, although the infrastructure was not identical in every Child First Authority site, all of the sites established structures and participants responsible for core areas and components of the program. In the first year, the BUILD organizer oversaw the relational aspects of the program, had the organizer title, and was the only person who carried out the same assigned and designated responsibilities at every site. For the rest of the positions, each site established similar titles and the participants with those titles had similar goals and carried out similar responsibilities. However, the goals, responsibilities, and activities varied according to the needs of the local site and according to the amount of support for the program. The availability of support for the program served as an indicator of the facility of the implementation.

By the end of the start-up year, a distinguishable model of the Child First extended-school-day program had come into existence: BUILD is responsible for the majority of the organization of the program at school sites; all school sites maintain core positions that address and are directly accountable for the key components of the program; the use of academic components aligned with the school-day curriculum is emphasized but social, cultural, and recreational activities are also important; and parent engagement through relational power remains the ultimate goal of the program.

Each Child First school operates four sessions during the year. The Planning Team organizes each session, submits a proposal to the Board, and receives approval of the proposal prior to the beginning of the session. All proposals *must* have the signatures of certain key stakeholders and *must* address the eight key components of the program.

LESSON 4: Each of the components can and should be fully developed.

The Child First Authority is attempting to do something that has not been customary for schools — working with communities, churches, and parents to create a "culture of change." This is a difficult task because the entities involved are not used to working collaboratively. Time must be spent to forge collaborative relationships and develop trust; then time must be spent to strengthen all the program components.

One weak component can directly and indirectly influence all of the other components. Through working together as members of the planning team, the various groups learn to define their roles and implement their services more strongly. The goal of these groups is to work together and strengthen the individual components, which will eventually strengthen the entire program. At the end of the first year, all the participants in Child First have learned that the stronger all of the components are, the more successful the program will be.

Early Second-Year Results

In the second year of the Child First Authority, the model is in place in eight sites and is becoming more clearly defined at each site. Each of the programs is familiar with the roles and responsibilities of the core staff, the design of the overall models, and the minimum necessities required to operate a CFA program in the school.

During the implementation stage of the second full year of Child First, each of the programs reports an increase in parental participation and improvements in the quality of parental involvement. Parents are now helping in the classrooms in ways other than "sharpening pencils" or "preparing dittos." Teachers and parents are reporting that parents are now coming to more school events and participating during the regular school day. School sites have mentioned that they have closer relationships with their parents after the first year, and both parents and school staff report that they realize that neither the teacher nor the parent is the "problem." Instead, they both place the interests of the children in the foreground, and experience the satisfying results of a parent/teacher educational alliance.

Teachers have reported that parents now greet them, and come to them for advice and solutions to problems. Parents appear to show greater appreciation for the services provided to their children and their families. From the opposite perspective, parents are reporting that teachers are more open to them, to their children, and to their communities. Many of the teachers have come to know the parents and have been able to interact with them. The improved relations between school staff and parents has facilitated effective education for the children and the community.

CFA has established a presence in the schools and in the community. Schools reported many requests for information about the program from parents, families, schools, and teachers before the second year of the program began. A number of schools held only one registration session or had to close registration quickly because the available slots were filled the first day.

The apparent public awareness has a double impact upon the effect of CFA in the community. During the first year of CFA, there were neighborhood walks, home meetings, and a few other activities and functions to make the communities aware of what the school had to offer in an attempt to increase Child First enrollment. From the results of the registration turnouts, it is apparent that the communities are well aware of CFA's existence. Some schools feel that the need for community awareness walk-through activities may no longer exist. Thus, some schools did not participate in the neighborhood walks at the beginning of this year.

Schools that did continue their neighborhood walks, however, reported that these activities were valuable for continuing to create, foster, and maintain community contacts, services, and relationships.

In the future, all sites plan to continue the home meetings and neighborhood walk-through events because they are essential not only to the recruitment of students, but also to the creation and fostering of positive community relationships.

Recommendations for Program Improvement

The purpose of this descriptive report on the Child First Authority program is to help the CFA Board of Directors and the CFA sites see what progress has been made on establishing the program and what steps might be taken to improve and strengthen the overall program and its components. This section discusses a number of possibilities.

- **Make the entry process for becoming a Child First site more organized.**

Schools entering the program in the start-up year often lacked a full understanding of what being a Child First school entailed. Child First is more than just an after-school program, although the after-school aspect is an important component. In the future, when the program is being introduced to the schools, the different stakeholders should be more explicit in the explanation of their goals. The different aspects of being a Child First school and the significance of one-on-one meetings, house meetings, and other methods of organizing should be explained to all of the entities involved at the beginning of the process. If schools are not willing to abide by the terms of the covenant after they have been made explicitly clear, they should not become Child First schools. However, if schools were not fully informed about what being a Child First school entailed, the parties involved should work together to alleviate the problem.

- **Implement training programs for academic goals.**

The Child First Authority relies heavily on parents, and some sites may involve parents in the academic components that are part of the extended-school-day program. Parents who participate in academic instruction must be provided with training and supervision by the school that speaks directly to the academic goals and alignment of the academic curriculum with the goals of the School Improvement Team. This is especially needed if the after-school academic program includes tutoring programs that aim to help low-achieving students.

- **Implement overall CFA training programs for all CFA staff.**

In addition to core academic training, it would be beneficial to have each site offer training programs, similar to the registration and orientation programs, that serve the purpose of training community members and parents to work effectively within the structures of the CFA program. This is important if Child First is to be a program that can be replicated across the city and eventually across the country. This type of a training program would provide the various members of CFA with a clear understanding of the purpose of the program, the organization of the program, the responsibilities of each Child First staff member, and the inter-connectedness of the program positions and structures. This type of training would also help to centralize the responsibilities of the various core staff members. This training program, of course, would differ from the BUILD and IAF (Industrial Areas Foundations) training that some participants already receive, although concepts of relational power and a culture of change would be incorporated into it.

- **Centralize assistance for CFA regulation and implementation.**

Currently, the Executive Director and the Executive Assistant are the main "compliance" people for the program. There is a need for additional centralized assistance in the Child First Authority main office in order to monitor program implementation at the sites and document the progress that each site is making. There is also a need to examine how some functions of the program might be more centralized in order to achieve more cost effectiveness and coordination of common activities.

Such assistance could, first, provide a person to monitor the overall work of the program to ensure that each site is complying with regulations and procedures, to work with each site toward improving their compliance and their overall implementation of the program, and to document that the core elements of the program are being put in place. This documentation would include data on volunteer attendance, regular participant attendance, curriculum alignment, program offerings, meetings conducted, and so on.

Such assistance could, second, identify program elements that are common at each site which could be more effectively administered and coordinated at the main office level. Examples of such activities include purchasing of food, supplies, and materials; providing academic training programs for parents; and coordinating the assessment of student progress in a standard way.

- **The members of the Board of Directors need to define program roles more clearly, address fund-raising issues, and increase their visibility at and knowledge of school sites.**

First-year accomplishments of the Child First Authority Board of Directors have been impressive. The Board carried out its responsibilities for approving program budgets, delegating money to participating schools, standardizing a reporting format for each site, establishing criteria for each participating school to agree to remain a Child First Authority school (CFA compact), conducting annual meetings, establishing policies and procedures, and initiating annual assessments to determine what sites to add to the program. It would be helpful to the Board, however, for members to define program roles more clearly, address fund-raising issues, and increase their school-site knowledge.

Defining program roles and addressing fund-raising issues. Some of the problems experienced by the Board in the first-year were directly related to defining a perspective of the program and resolving fund-raising issues. The CFA Board of Directors' initial meetings reflected a fair degree of tension, as the various appointees from the Mayor's office, City council, and BUILD had their own perspectives of what Child First was. They all knew from the legislation and from public pronouncement that it was a unique after-school program, and they all knew that there was going to be some community organizing. They all knew that BUILD was going to be a lead organization for the community organizing, because that was a strength that BUILD brought to the table. But the extent of the uniqueness of Child First had not yet been defined. Over the period of the first year, the Board had to work hard on building relationships between members and defining responsibilities, such as, to what degree did BUILD have the authority to raise money for Child First Authority? Did BUILD have the authority to speak for Child First once the Board was in place? If BUILD decided to use "creative tension"to raise money from government, sports teams, and corporations, how would they differentiate their actions from the desires of the Board?

It was understood that BUILD had conceived of the Child First Authority notion. It was also understood that BUILD would be responsible for a specific part of the fund-raising: soliciting re-dedicatable funds. What was problematic to the Board was whether BUILD was free to engage in the use of "creative tension" in its fund raising and advocacy, as it had in other projects. The Board was concerned that this fund-raising technique could create political problems for the Child First initiative. Some of the Board members did not know when BUILD was going after public dollars for CFA from the Orioles, Ravens, or other entities, and how they were doing it (e.g., through newspaper articles, picketing, or rallies). Thus, most of the

struggle on the Board during the first year was created by the need to define roles — who could do what and what the parameters were.

As the year progressed, the roles of the Board members became more clearly defined and understood, and the members were able to work more effectively as a team.

The issue of fund raising has still not been fully resolved. The Child First Authority still does not have an independent method of fund raising, and some Board members believe that they need to hire a fund raiser on staff. Whether such a person is hired or not, the authority needs to establish a fund-raising policy. Board members seem to agree that they would like to use re-dedicatable funds as the major source of funding, but significant amounts of money are available from other sources which, with a fund-raiser on staff, they could be positioned to act upon.

Increasing visibility at and knowledge of school sites. Board members should make themselves more visible by visiting sites more frequently. The Board should know more about the day-to-day activities of the program, what it means to create a culture of change, and the importance of the various parties in creating a successful program. They should also be able to define what factors make a Child First Authority school different from any other after-school program.

Conclusion

At the end of the start-up year, the results of the Child First Authority in Baltimore have been encouraging. Child First after-school programs have been established and their parameters have been defined. School sites report that the processes of registration, orientation, and recruitment have been much easier to carry out this year, due to the first-year experience.

The schools are aware that parental involvement is a crucial factor in Child First. In general, the number of parent volunteers in the programs has increased, the parent volunteers have improved their attendance, and the types of parental involvement have improved. Many of the schools have received awards from their area superintendents for improved parental involvement and improved student attendance. However, all schools realize that in order to meet the goal of the program, much more work still needs to be done. The different entities must remain enlightened about the ultimate goal of the program — parental engagement — so that *all* programs can achieve success.

The success of the program in the future depends on the extent to which all of the parties involved are able to be explicitly clear with one another about what a successful Child First program entails. All of the participants must realize that an academically effective extended-school-day Child First program does not have to be a program in which everyone approves of all the activities that are conducted, but certain core concepts and structures must be established and maintained. The next full year is crucial for clearing any misunderstandings about what it is that makes a good Child First program. The extent to which this can be done will ultimately decide whether the Child First Authority program will move from encouraging, to promising, and eventually to effective.

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Endnote

1. Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development (BUILD) is a local branch of a national organizing entity, the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), originally created to empower local community members. Cortes (1993) describes the main mission of (IAF) as "building the competence and confidence of ordinary citizens and taxpayers so that they can reorganize the relationships of power and politics in their communities" (pp. 295).

Some issues that the IAF has been involved in over the years include meaningful employment, improving education, and improving the quality of life in the inner-city. IAF uses trained professional organizers to recruit community members in an attempt to eventually make them local community leaders and activists. IAF training teaches individual community members, rather than institutions, to become informed consumers of social power and active agents of change. In doing this, the community members learn the differences between unilateral power and relational power, and they are taught to seek the latter. IAF philosophy teaches that in order to attain relational power, entities that have unilateral power must be willing to give it up and re-distribute it in the form of relational power.

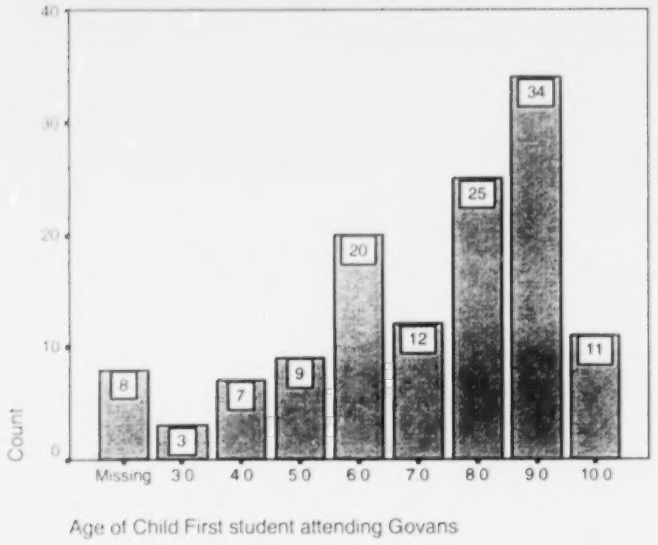
Creating relational power in the schools is a key goal of the BUILD organizers in Child First schools, and their vehicle for creating such power is teaching parents and schools the differences between parental engagement and parental involvement, using the after-school program as the hub of activity.

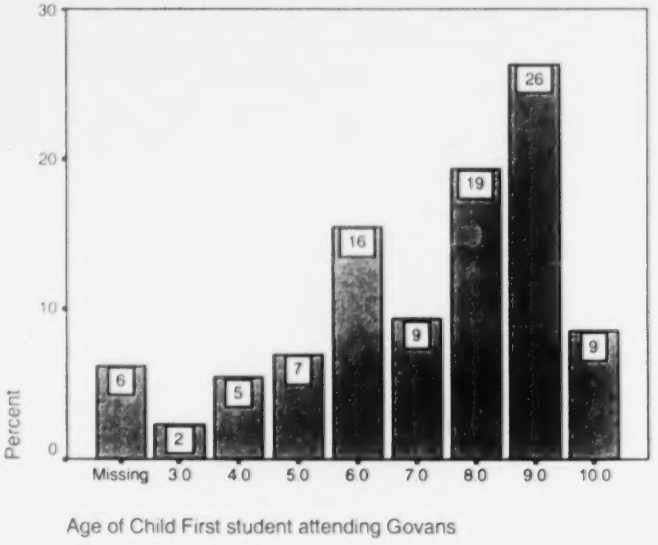
As it relates to working with schools, IAF and BUILD specifically seek to reform schools by teaching "parent engagement" as a method of "creating a culture of change" (Giles, 1998). Engagement is seen as meaningful participation based upon carefully strategized prepared plans that have specific intended outcomes. In order for parents to reach this point, they are taught, using the IAF philosophy, how to become agents of change by taking responsibility for and claiming power that is theirs. But in order for parents to become successful agents of change, a number of things must happen. They must be taught about the concept of power as it relates to the IAF philosophy. They must be willing to become agents of change, and to affect change. Finally, the people who currently have power must be willing to re-analyze their methods of operating, and understand the concept of "shared power" and its importance in "affecting change" or "creating a culture of change," using a specific IAF method known as "power analysis."

Giles (1998) characterizes the school and the community as an ecological system. The school does not exist in a vacuum, but rather, as a part of a larger group of forces that affect the lives of children, families, and communities. To affect change in a positive and effective way, all of the parts of the ecology must be able to understand and exercise power. This is what makes the role of the organizers key. Their responsibility is to continuously teach the various groups to seek and work together using relational power.

Appendix A

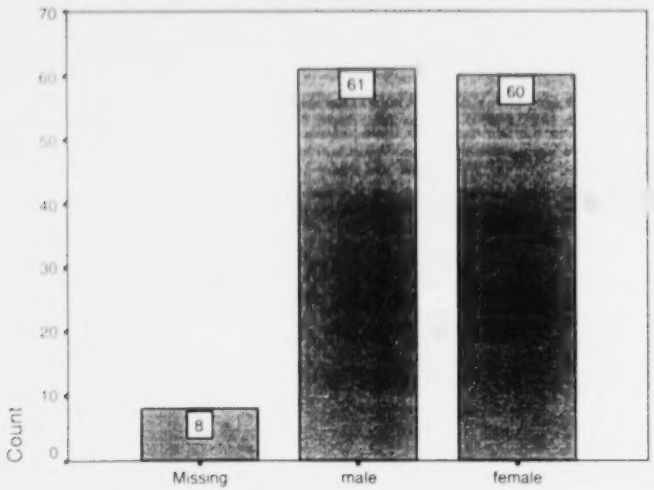
Ages of Students at Govans Child First Academy

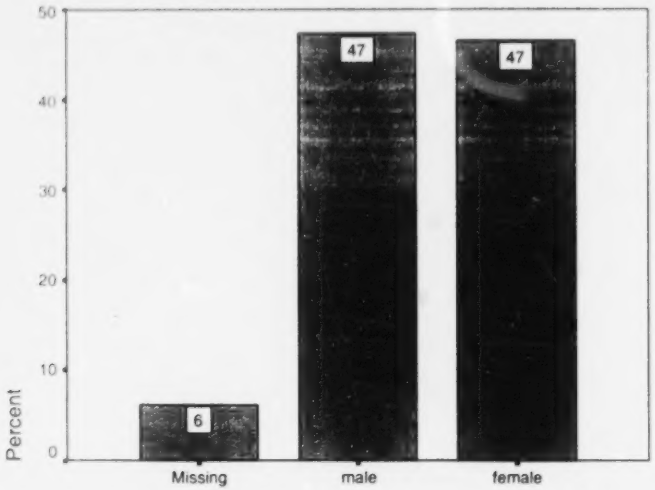




The majority (59%) of the students attending the Govans Child First Academy are between the ages of eight and nine. The next largest population of students in the after-school program (20%) are six years of age.

Student Gender Percentages at Govans Child First Academy



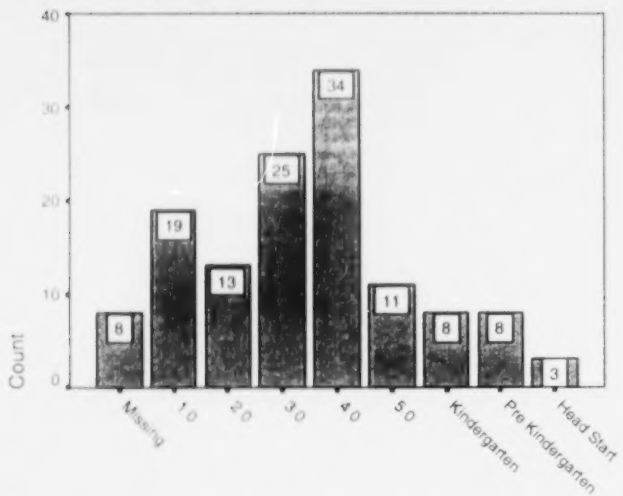


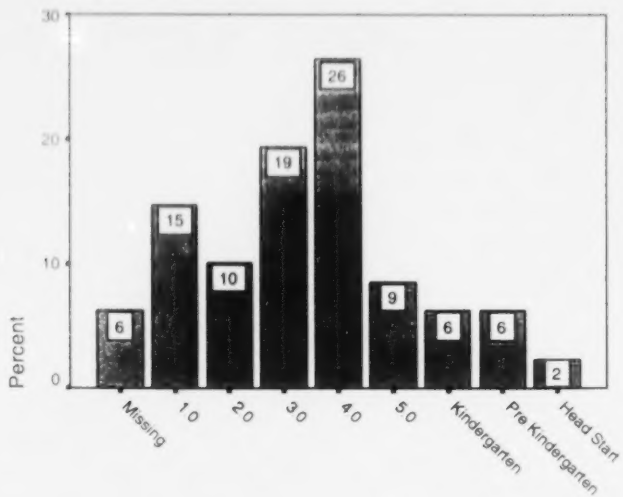
The gender distribution of the student population at Govans Child First Academy is approximately half and half. (47% male and 47% female)

45

45 A

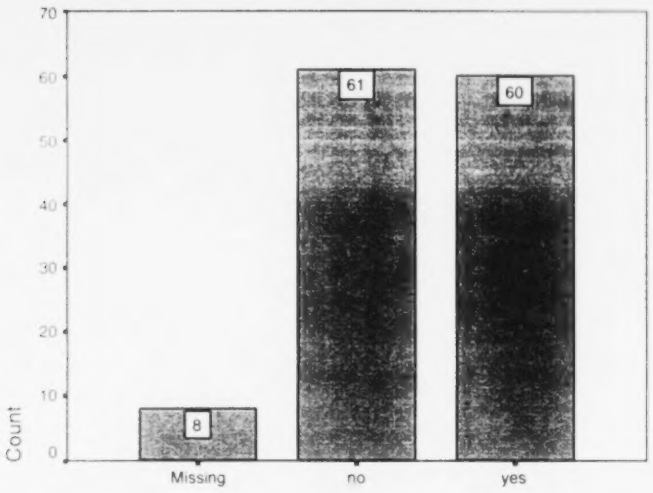
Grade Levels of Students at Govans Child First Academy



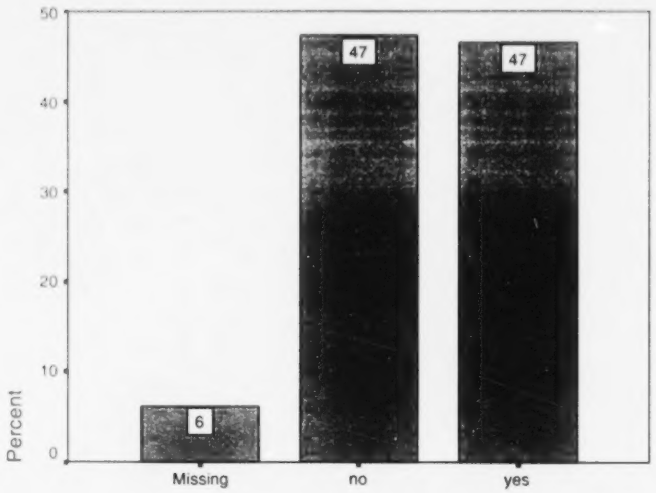


Twenty-six percent of the students in the Govans Child First Academy are in the fourth grade.

Parent Participation at the Govans Child First Academy



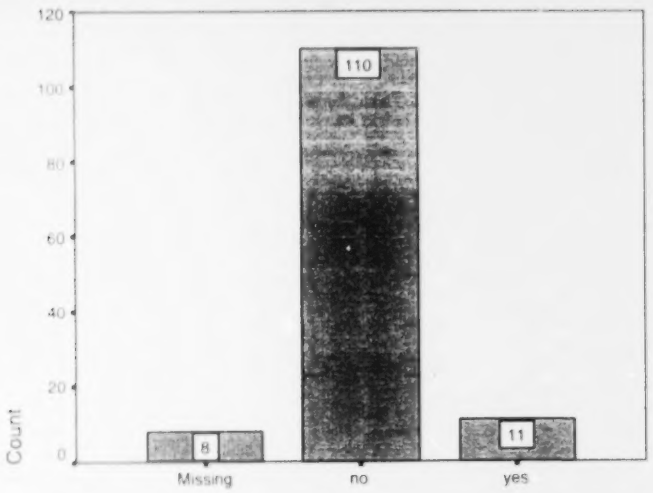
Are (is) the parent(s) participating in the program?



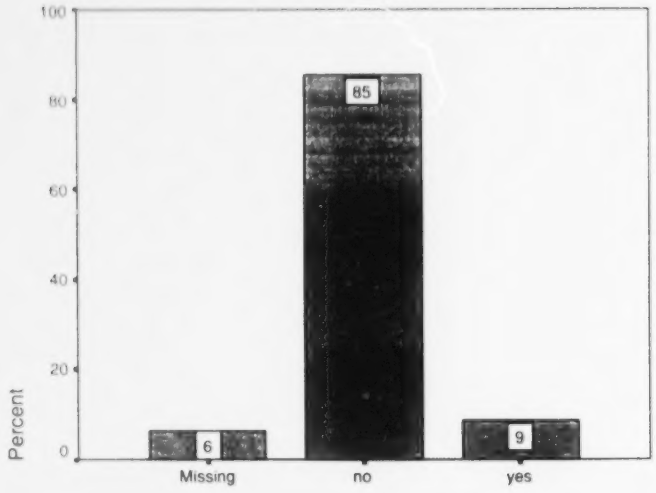
Is (are) the parent(s) participating in the program?

Approximately half (47%) of the students' parents are participating in the after-school program.

Parent Participation with the Child First Planning Team at Govans Elementary School



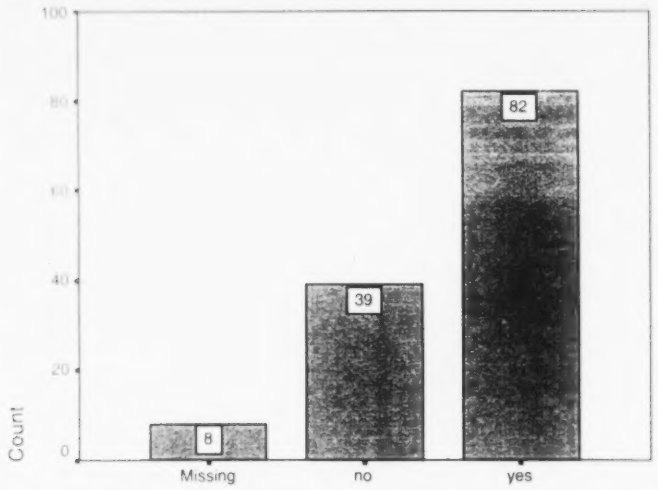
Is (are) the parent(s) a part of the CFA planning team?

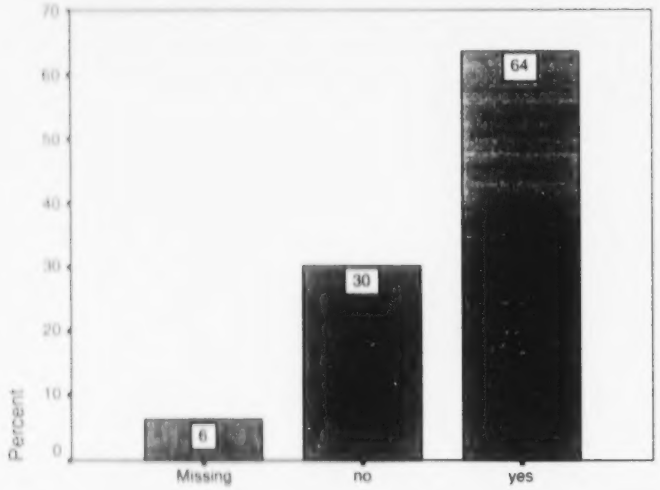


Is (are) the parent(s) a part of the CFA planning team?

Eight-five percent of the students' parents are not a part of the Child First Planning Team.

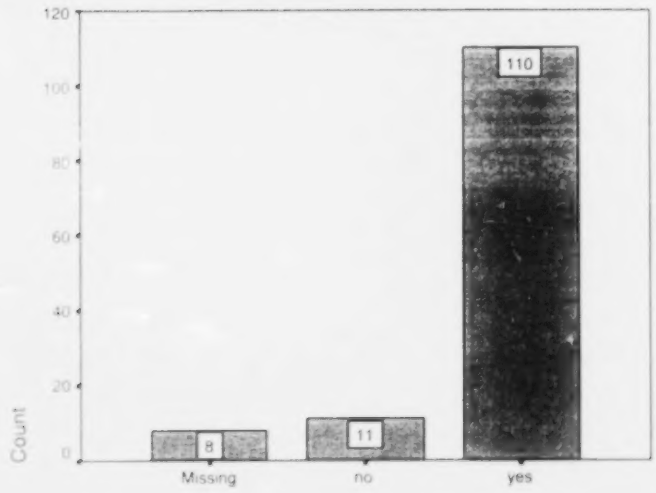
Parent Attendance of Govans Child First Open-House Activities

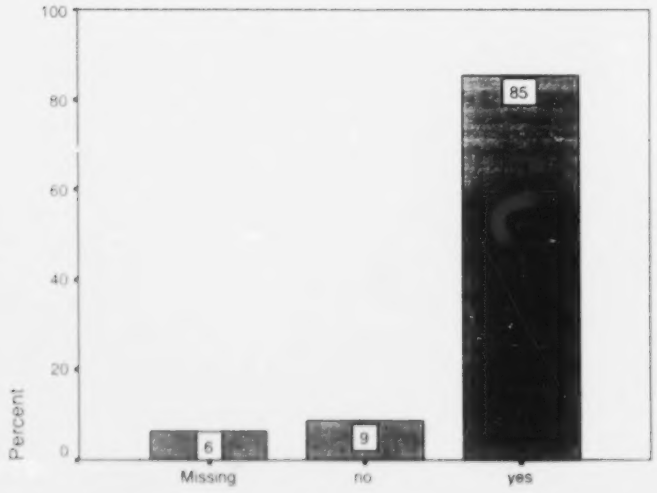




The majority of the parents (64%) attend Child First open-house activities.

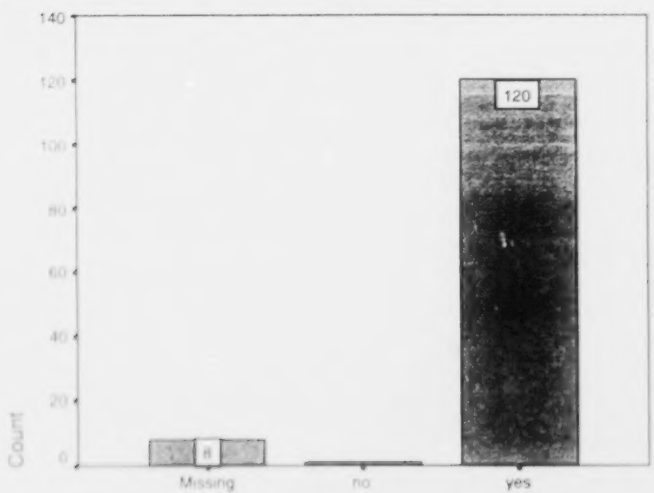
Parent Attendance of Govans Child First PTA Conferences

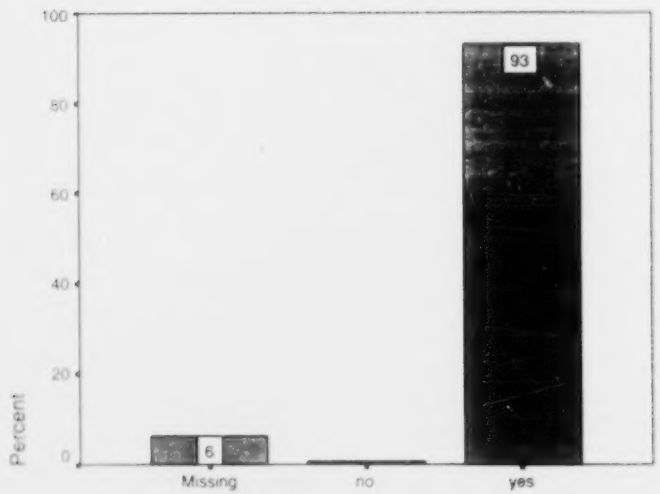




Eight-five percent of the parents are reported as attending PTA conferences.

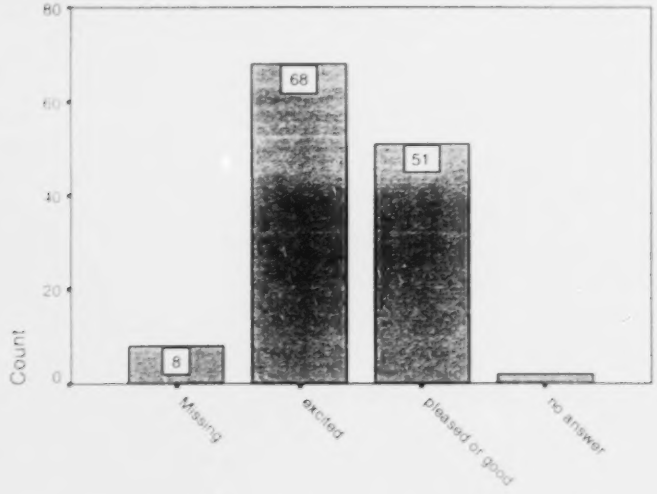
Parent Attendance of Govans Child First Teacher Conferences

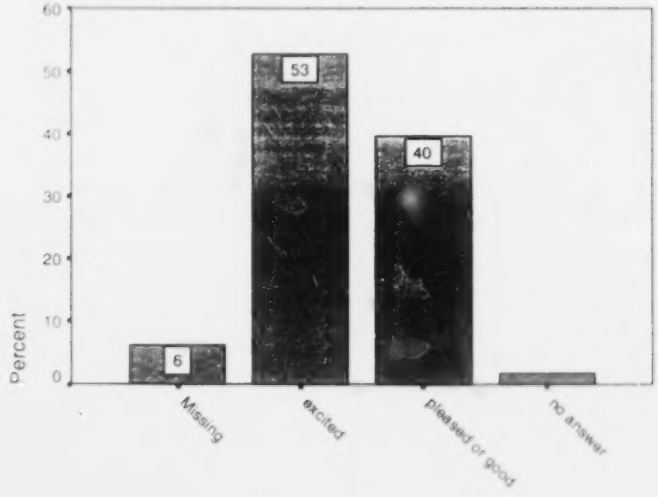




The vast majority of the parents (93%) are reported as attending teacher conferences.

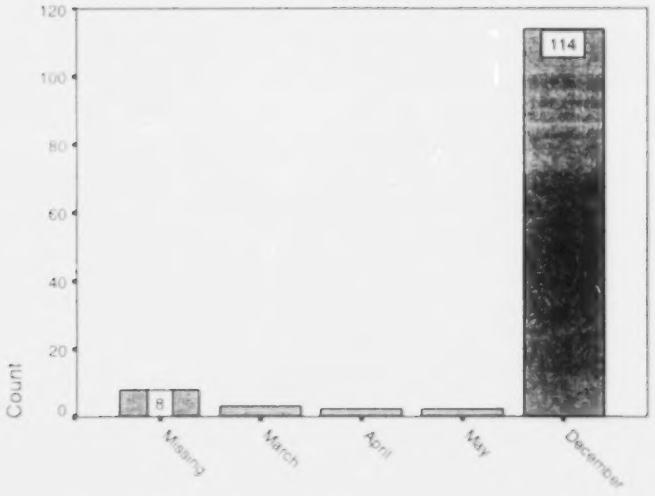
Parent Reactions to Student Progress at Govans Child First Academy

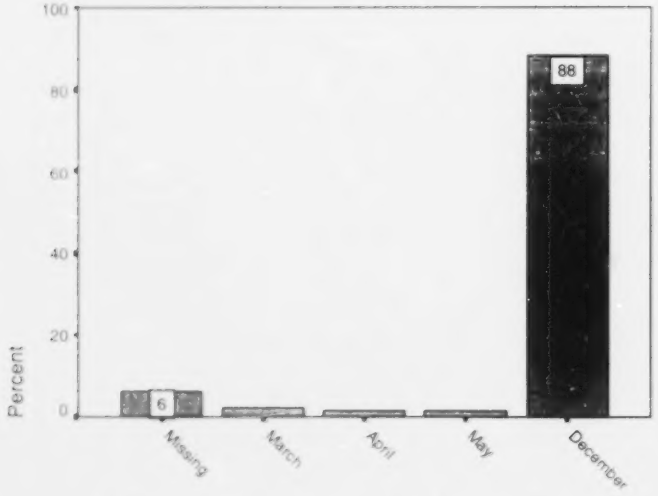




The majority of the parents had positive feelings towards the effects of the Child First Academy. Fifty-three percent of the parents indicated feeling excited about the progress of their children in the program. Forty percent of the parents admitted to being pleased with the outcomes of the program.

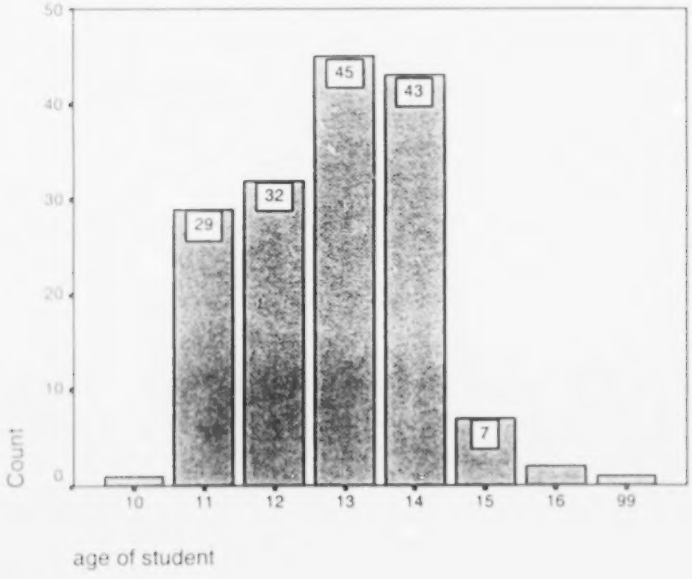
Starting Months for Students at Govans Child First Academy

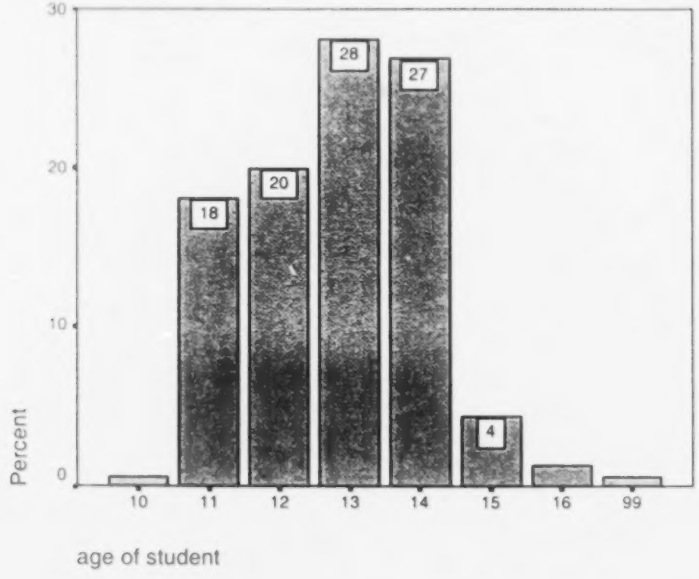




Eighty-eight percent of the students in the Govans Child First Academy began to attend the program in December.

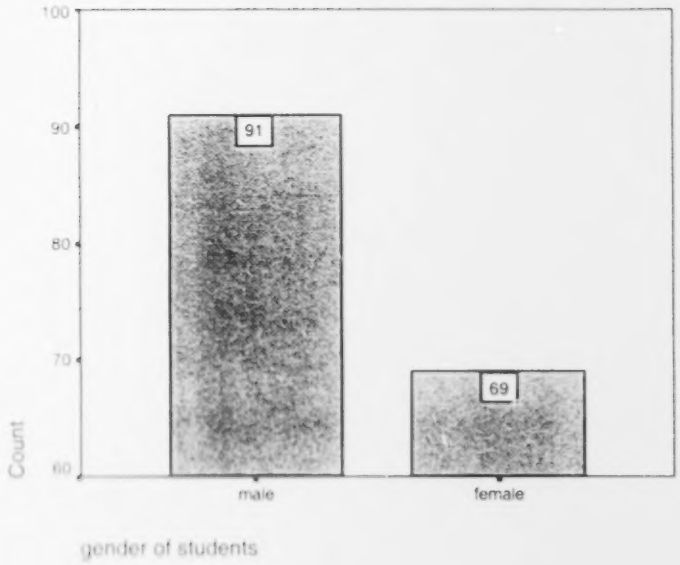
Ages of Students at Greenspring Middle Child First Academy

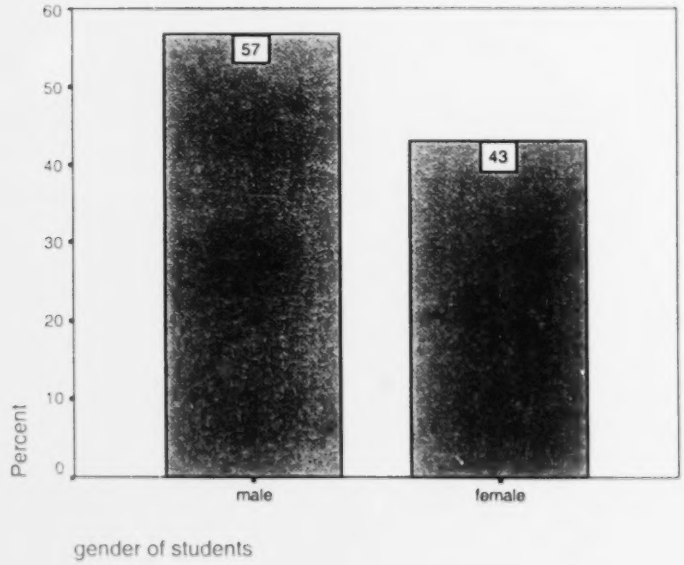




The majority of the students (54%) attending the Greenspring Middle Child First Academy are between the ages of 14 and 15. The next largest population of students in the after-school program (38%) are between the ages of 11 and 12.

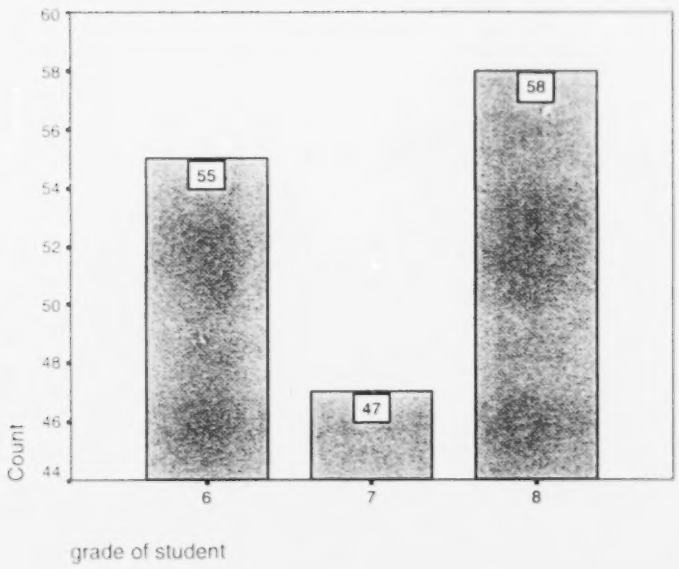
Student Gender Percentages at Greenspring Middle Child First Academy

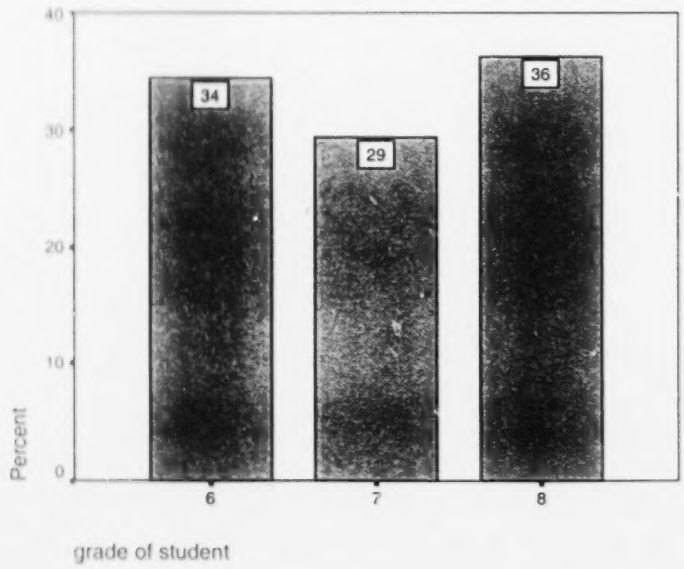




The majority of the student population (57%) at the Greenspring Middle Child First Academy is male.

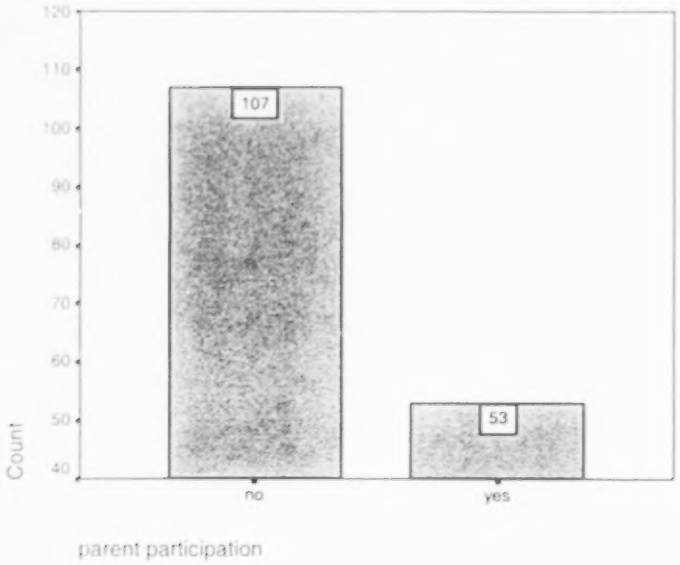
Grade Levels of Students at Greenspring Middle Child First Academy

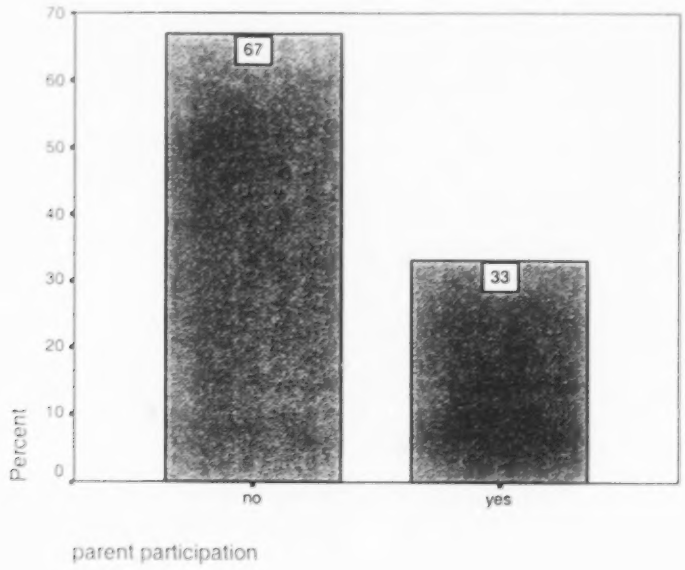




The after-school academy student population is fairly evenly dispersed over the three grade level. The eighth grade after-school program, however, has the largest percentage of participating students (36%).

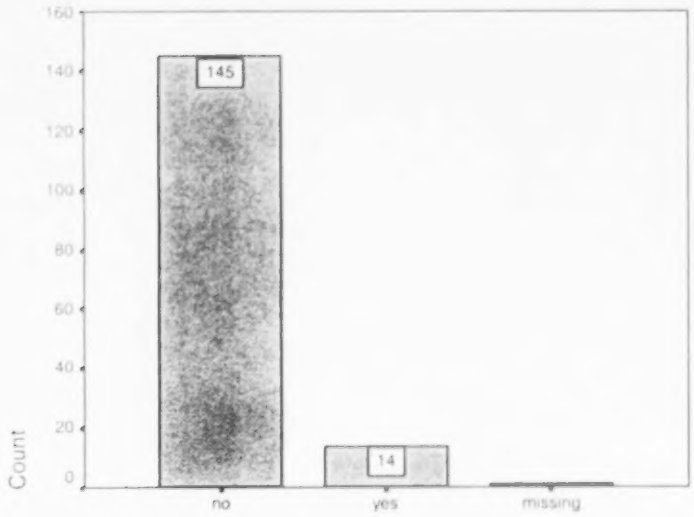
Parent Participation at the Greenspring Middle Child First Academy

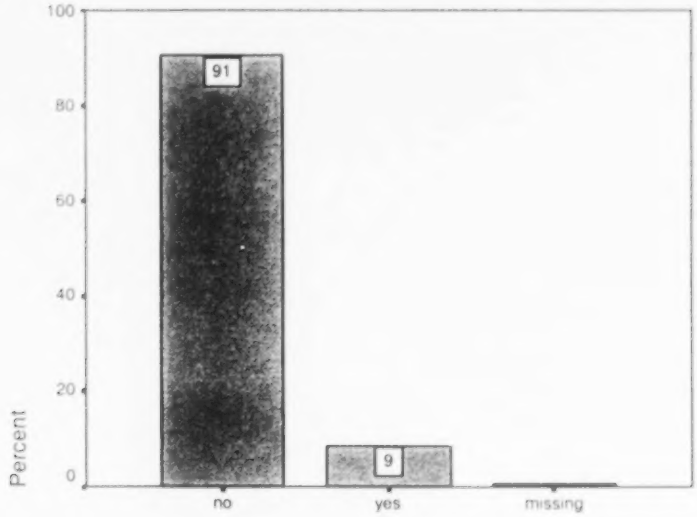




The majority of the students' parents (67%) do not participate in the Child First Academy.

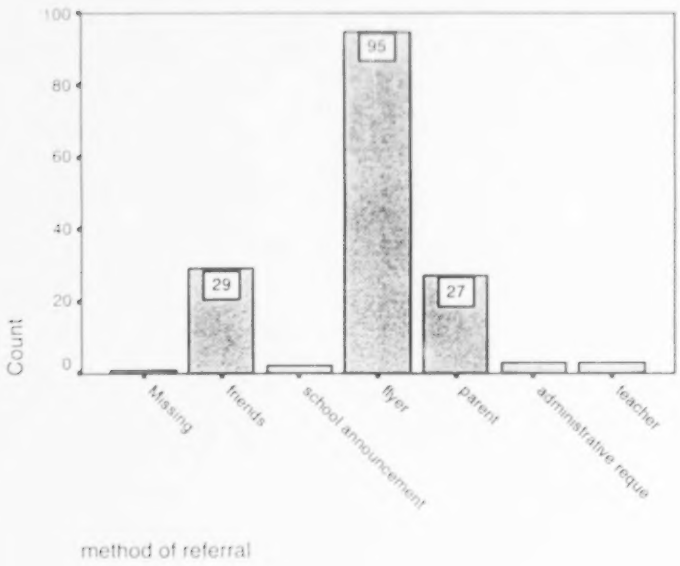
Parent Participation with the CFA Committee at the Greenspring Middle Child First Academy

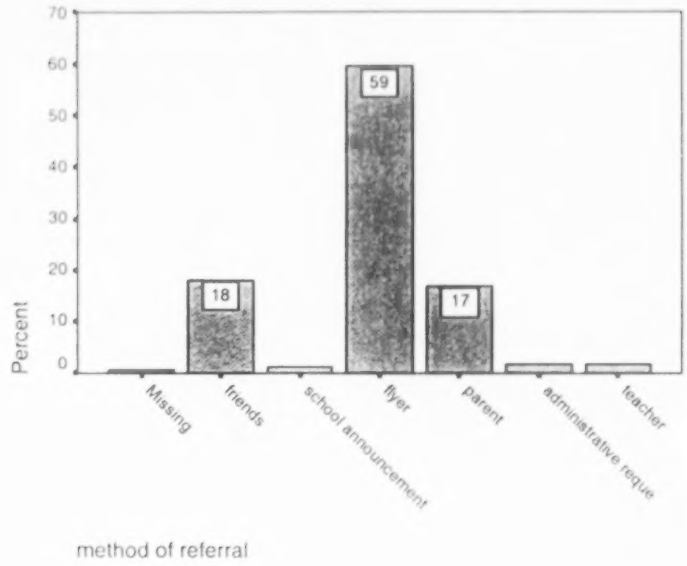




Ninety-one percent of the parents are not members of the Child First Authority Committee.

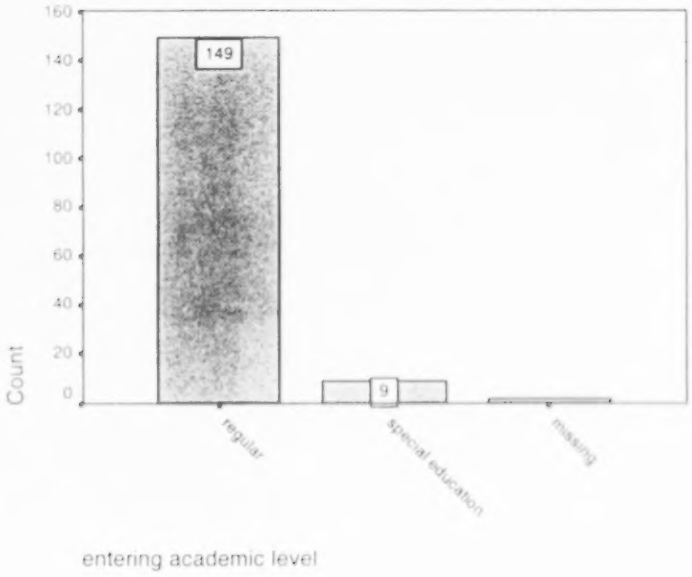
Methods through which students learned about the Greenspring Middle Child First Academy

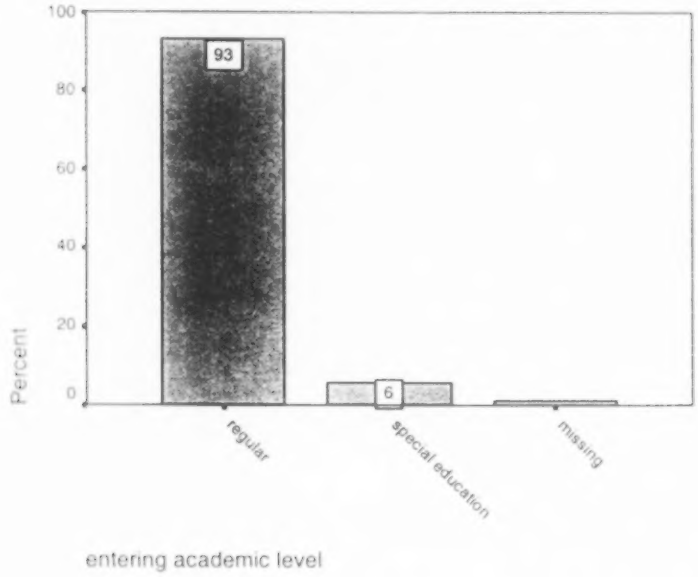




Fifty-nine percent of the students found out about the Greenspring Child First Academy through flyers advertising the program. Student, however, also learned about the program from friends (18%) and parents (17%).

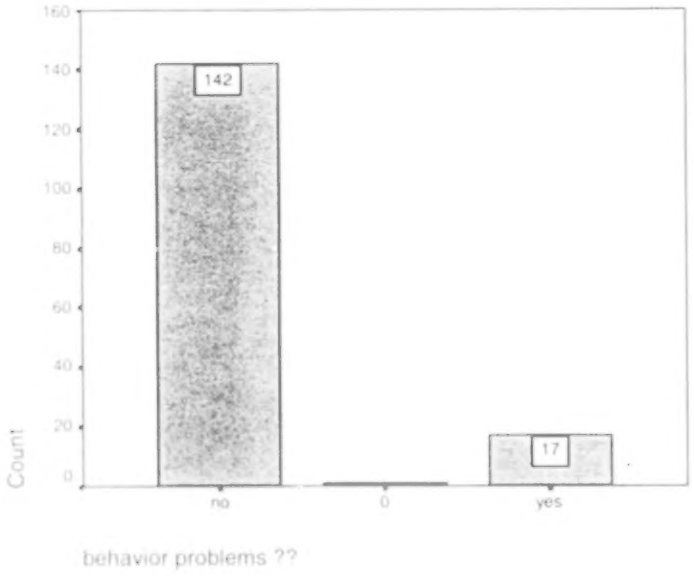
Student Entry Academic Levels at the Greenspring Middle Child First Academy

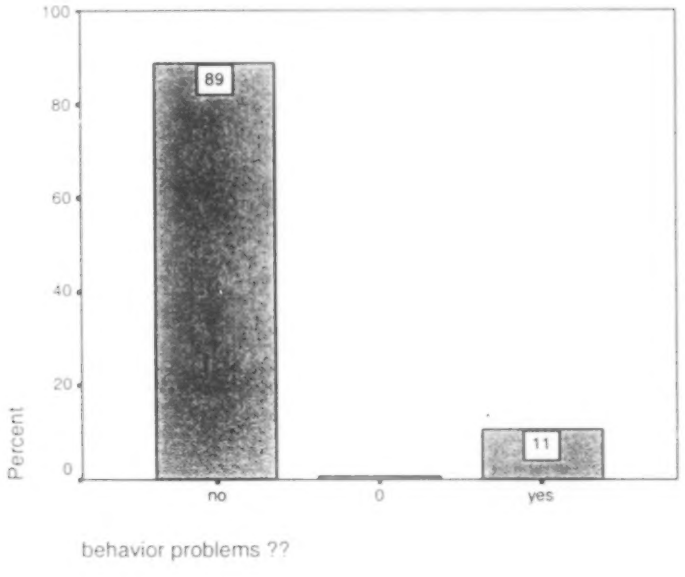




The majority of the students (93%) at the Greenspring Child First Academy are enrolled in regular classes during the school day.

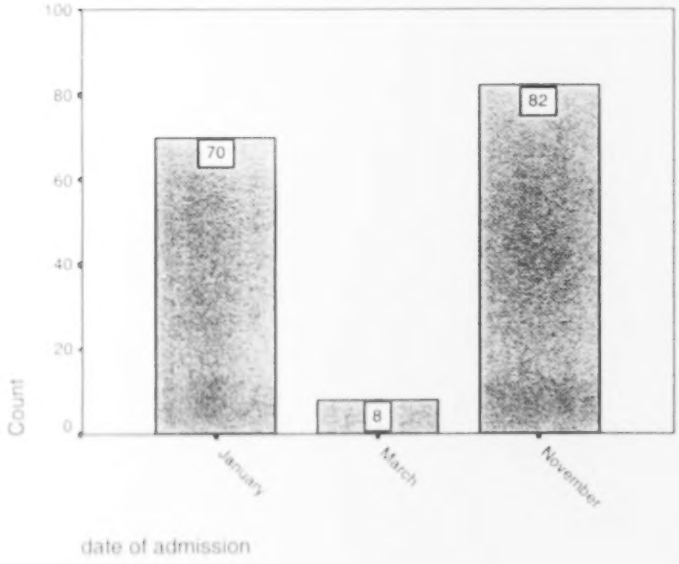
Students with Behavioral Problems at the Greenspring Middle Child First Academy

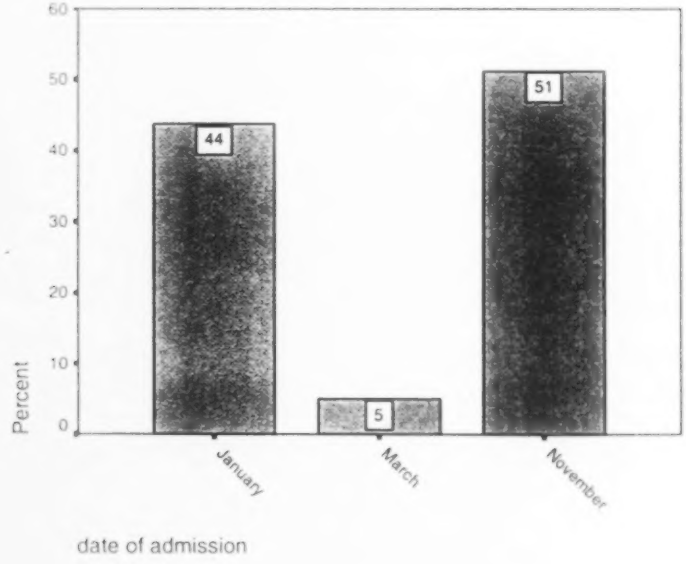




Ninety-three percent of the students are reported as not having behavioral problems.

Starting Months for Students at Greenspring Middle Child First Academy





Fifty-one percent of the students enrolled in the Greenspring Middle Child First Academy began to attend the program in November. Forty-four percent began to attend in January. The remaining five percent began in March.

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